Commentary
June 1998

"Sexgate," the Sisterhood, and Mr. Bumble

Norman Podhoretz

What to Do About Saddam Hussein
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Art, Politics & Clement Greenberg
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E.O. Wilson's Theory of Everything
Jeremy Bernstein

Books in Review
James Nuechterlein • Phillip M. Richards • Diana Schaub
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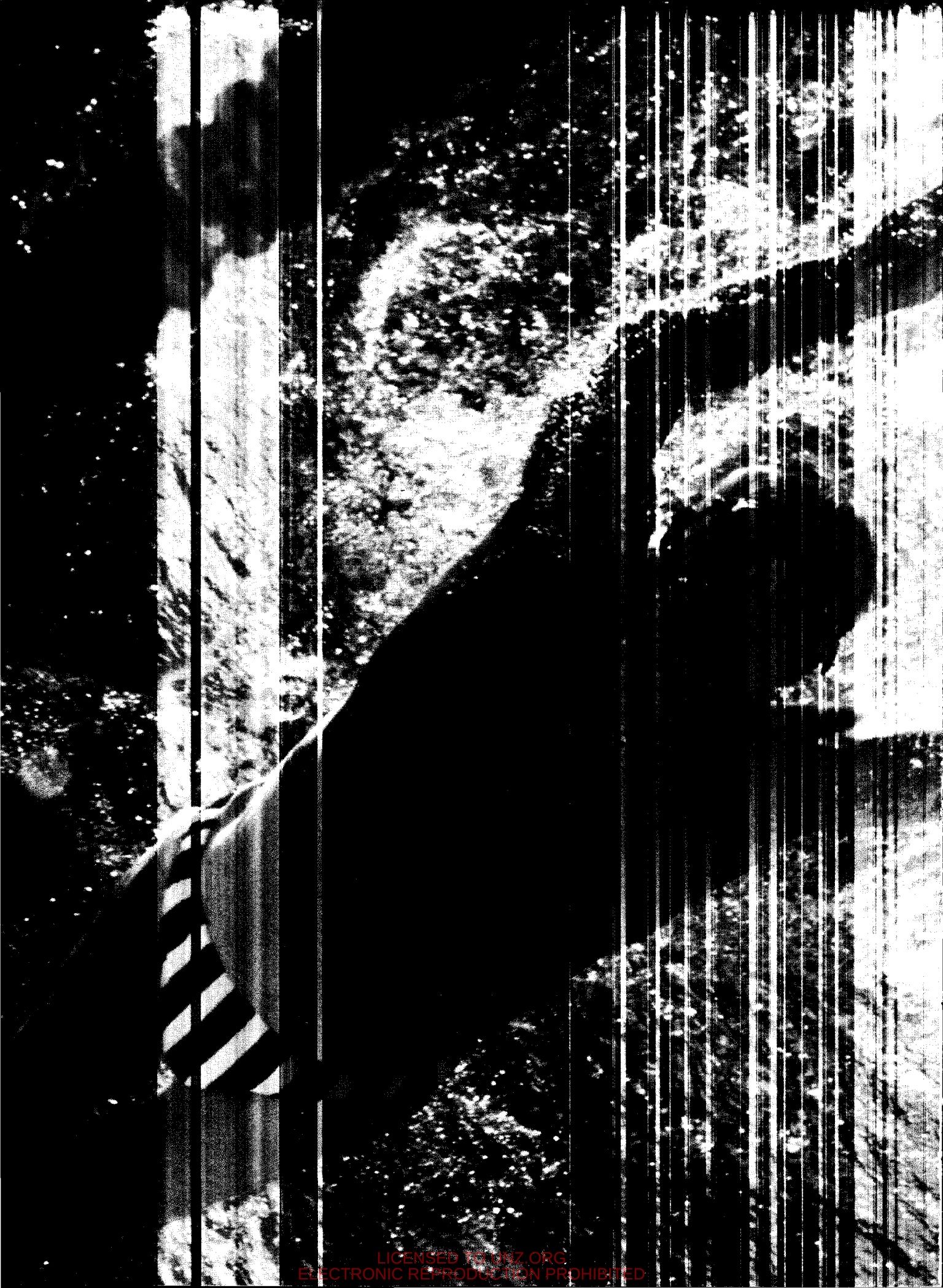

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Commentary
June 1998

Letters from Readers

"Amistad"

To the Editor:

In "'Amistad' and the Abuse of History" [February] Gary Rosen goes too far. It is easy to dismiss historical films as bad history, and reviewers invariably condemn them for distorting and oversimplifying the past. *Amistad* makes a ready target. Why, one asks, does the film fabricate a black abolitionist when a real-life figure—a fugitive slave and Yale-educated minister named J.W.C. Pennington—was readily available? Why does the film show Martin Van Buren replacing the District Court judge, when no such incident took place? And why does the film place the phrase "make us free" in an adult's mouth, when the actual words were written by an eleven-year-old Mende boy named Kale in a poignant and powerful letter to John Quincy Adams? Sometimes real life is more interesting than a screenwriter's imaginings.

Nevertheless, despite some important distortions and omissions, *Amistad* does what films can do and history texts cannot: it brings the past to life. In a society as contemptuous of the past as ours, it is a much greater feat to resurrect the truly "lost world" of antebellum America, to bring long-forgotten historical figures back to life, and to remind viewers that this country carries a historical burden that does not disappear simply because it is evaded and ignored. "A deft piece of movie-making . . . persuasive in its evocation of period ambience" (Mr. Rosen's phrases) should not be dismissed lightly.

The *Amistad* trial was a critical incident in American history because it showed abolitionists new ways to fight against slavery: by dramatizing the illegal means by which Africans were enslaved and the federal government's complicity in slavery. Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* makes these essential points in dramatic and moving fashion.

Lesley S. Herrmann
Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
New York City

Steven Mintz
University of Houston
Houston, Texas

To the Editor:

Gary Rosen raises many good points about how *Amistad*'s screenplay bowed to political correctness and bent the truth in doing so, but he overlooks a larger truth: neither I nor any of my white, well-educated friends, reasonably knowledgeable in the history of our country, had ever heard of the incident.

Although not as significant in our national history as the *Dred Scott* decision or the Missouri Compromise, the *Amistad* affair was notable in several respects: it involved a foreign power and issues of national sovereignty; it was intertwined with congressional and presidential politics; and it was argued in front of the Supreme Court by an ex-President (surely rare in our history). But most important of all, it was an instance of a revolt by blacks against their enslavement, and should be as great a source of pride to black Americans as the tales of Jewish partisans who fought the Nazis in the forests of Eastern Europe are to Jews.

The omission of any mention of the incident from most histories and textbooks lends credence to the claims of American blacks that important parts of their history have been overlooked.

Robert L. Blumberg
La Jolla, California

To the Editor:

Gary Rosen is right that Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* is permeated by liberal racial stereotypes of African-Americans. He seems to be unaware, however, that this ideology—far from being a sign of current multicultur-

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al political correctness—has deep historical roots, going back to the antebellum period and even earlier. Mr. Rosen ought to consult Wylie Sypher's *Guinea's Captive Kings* (1942), which begins with a chapter on the irrepressible Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko; Or the Royal Slave* (1688). Not only is Steven Spielberg's Cinqué in this tradition of *noir* noble savagery, so, too, with a Christianized inflection, is Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom.

Mr. Rosen's belief that abolitionism was immune from 19th-century racial romanticization of blacks because it was a pristine offshoot of 18th-century natural-rights philosophy is as naive and unhistorical as any of Steven Spielberg's notions.

HAROLD BRACKMAN
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Despite the dramatic spectacle presented in the Spielberg film of ex-President John Quincy Adams appearing before the U.S. Supreme Court as an advocate for a group of black prisoners, the *Amistad* case itself is relatively unimportant as a legal precedent, and it is not surprising that it was virtually ignored for many years. It is no landmark on the road to emancipation.

The legal issue as the Court saw it turned on a technicality or loophole keyed to the question of whether the prisoners were captured into slavery in Africa or were born into slavery in Cuba. The importance of the case rests not upon that technical loophole but upon what it reveals about legal strategy in cases involving highly-charged public issues.

Though he appeared as co-counsel only when the case finally reached the Supreme Court, Adams is nevertheless portrayed in the film as the central legal figure. Actually, Roger Baldwin, later Connecticut's governor and senator, was the legal strategist of the abolitionists behind the *Amistad* case. But in the film he is caricatured and his role is minimized.

Baldwin's argument was two-pronged, covering both the high ground about the institution of slavery itself and the technical point about the prisoners' origin. The brief is filled with ideas presaging the arguments made but rejected in the *Dred Scott* case years later; and its reliance on the constitutional illegitimacy of slavery, based on the principles of the American Revolution and particularly the Declaration of Independence, resonates in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Baldwin's extraordinary argument was printed in full in the Supreme Court report of the case whereas Adams's argument was omitted, for reasons made clear in the following note of the Court's official reporter, which was buried deep in the Supreme Court record of the case:

> It was the purpose of [this] reporter to insert the able and interesting argument of Mr. Adams for the African appellees; and publication . . . has been postponed in the hope of obtaining it. . . . It has not been received. As many of the points presented by Mr. Adams in the discussion of the case were not considered by the Court essential to its decision, and were not taken notice of in the opinion of the Court, delivered by Mr. Justice Story the necessary omission of the argument is submitted to with less regret.

Justice Story in a later, *ex-officio* private comment, as Gary Rosen points out in his article, characterized Adams's argument as "extraordinary . . . for its power, for its bitter sarcasm," but "dealing with topics far beyond the record and points of discussion."

Thus, the *Amistad* case was won on a technicality, instead of lost on high principles. Litigants, pundits, and social idealists in cases involving charged public issues want to win on only the highest and purest idealistic grounds. The goal of skilled lawyers, on the other hand, is to win on any ground—technical or substantive. Winning is the categorical imperative. Progress is made through a series of small steps, a grand strategy Thurgood Marshall, for example, pursued a century later and used so successfully in breaking down segregation. The social objective follows as a result.

Was Baldwin, in winning the *Amistad* case on a technical loophole, portending Marshall's strategy?

MAURICE ROSENFIELD
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

In connection with Gary Rosen's article, the following brief reference from *The Growth of the American Republic* by Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, might be of interest: "The 'ironic epilogue' [to the *Amistad* case] is that Cinqué, once back home, set himself up as a slave trader."

EDITH J. MARTIN
Scarsdale, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

When my February COMMENTARY arrived, I turned straight to Gary Rosen's article on *Amistad*. It is a badly needed correction of the sort of Spielbergian dishonesty and liberal masochism that is offensive to the truth. Point by point, Mr. Rosen ticks off the mischievous fibs that spoil what, on its own, might genuinely have been a "helluva story."

DANIEL M. CRABB
El Centro, California

TO THE EDITOR:

This is to congratulate Gary Rosen on his *Amistad* piece. These days, history is abused far too often. Our young people are susceptible to the siren call of Hollywood "histories" in part because they rarely read serious material and then later get scrambled versions in revisionist courses in college. It is an ongoing battle, but Mr. Rosen is standing his ground well. Keep it up!

NEIL TROOST
Tampa, Florida

GARY ROSEN writes:

Lesley S. Herrmann and Steven Mintz have a curious idea of what it means for a movie to "bring the past to life." Is persuasive "period ambience" really all they demand? More fundamental, I would think, is whether the events depicted actually took place and are presented in a historically plausible way. On both counts, Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* fails, and for reasons that spring directly from the prevailing political orthodoxies of Hollywood.

Of particular note, as I argued, is the movie's self-conscious effort to exaggerate the role played by blacks in the case and to denigrate

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the evangelical Christianity of the white abolitionists who in fact secured the release of the *Amistad* captives. One of Mrs. Herrmann and Mr. Mintz's points is especially revealing in this regard: they are unbothered by the movie's invention of the black abolitionist Theodore Joadson because, as they see it, he is just a stand-in for the real-life black abolitionist J.W.C. Pennington.

But the Reverend Pennington, unlike the fictional Joadson, played no part in the legal defense of the captives, and became deeply involved with them only after he saw that they could help fulfill his plan for, as he put it, "carrying the Gospel to Africa," a continent whose inhabitants he described as "the heathen." In the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in the case, Pennington joined other black ministers in founding the Union Missionary Society, thus making it possible for the freed *Amistad* captives to continue their instruction in Christianity and English upon returning to Africa. In this endeavor, I might add, Pennington was joined by the white abolitionist Lewis Tappan, whom Spielberg's Joadson repudiates as a racist. In sum, and contrary to the view of Mrs. Herrmann and Mr. Mintz, J.W.C. Pennington's Christian fervor made him precisely the sort of person whom Spielberg intended to exclude from the racial and religious universe of *Amistad*.

Mrs. Herrmann and Mr. Mintz are willing to forgive such distortions because the film, they say, has brought to light a "critical" episode in our history. Robert L. Blumberg agrees, noting that despite the obvious importance of the *Amistad* affair, even "reasonably knowledgeable" persons like himself had never before heard of it. But let us not get carried away. The reason that so few people previously knew about Cinqué and his hapless shipmates is that their ordeal, for all its drama, constitutes little more than a footnote in antebellum history.

As Maurice Rosenfield ably explains in his letter, the Supreme Court decided the case on a technicality, setting no legal precedent of any consequence. Moreover, since the circumstances surrounding the *Amistad* affair were so extraordinary, it did not even give abolitionists "new ways to fight slavery," as Mrs. Herrmann and Mr. Mintz grandly claim. In the end, its prime effect was to give a slight stir to the pot of North-South tensions.

The real interest of the *Amistad* affair lies not in its historical impact, which was slight, but in what it can tell us about resistance to slavery in the turbulent years leading up to the Civil War. Most obviously, of course, the case shows that some Africans fought ferociously against their own enslavement; this is the side of the story at which Spielberg excels. No less important, however, the *Amistad* affair allows us to see why some Americans devoted themselves so single-mindedly to the anti-slavery cause. Their inspiration, as I discussed in my article, was a mix of two quintessentially American creeds: militant, reform-minded Protestantism, on the one hand, and the egalitarian principles of the Declaration of Independence, on the other. In *Amistad*, to his discredit, Spielberg casts aspersions on the former and makes a politically-correct hash of the latter.

Harold Brackman is no doubt right to detect an element of racial romanticism in the abolitionists; I never said otherwise. But he is mistaken to find in this a forerunner of Spielberg's celebration of all things African. For the abolitionists, "*noir* noble savagery" was a state of innocence, rendering blacks more perfectly open to the truths of reason and revelation. Spielberg, by contrast, assigns equal value to the customs and beliefs of Africa; in the film, Cinqué and his ancestral spirits walk arm-in-arm with John Quincy Adams and the American founders.

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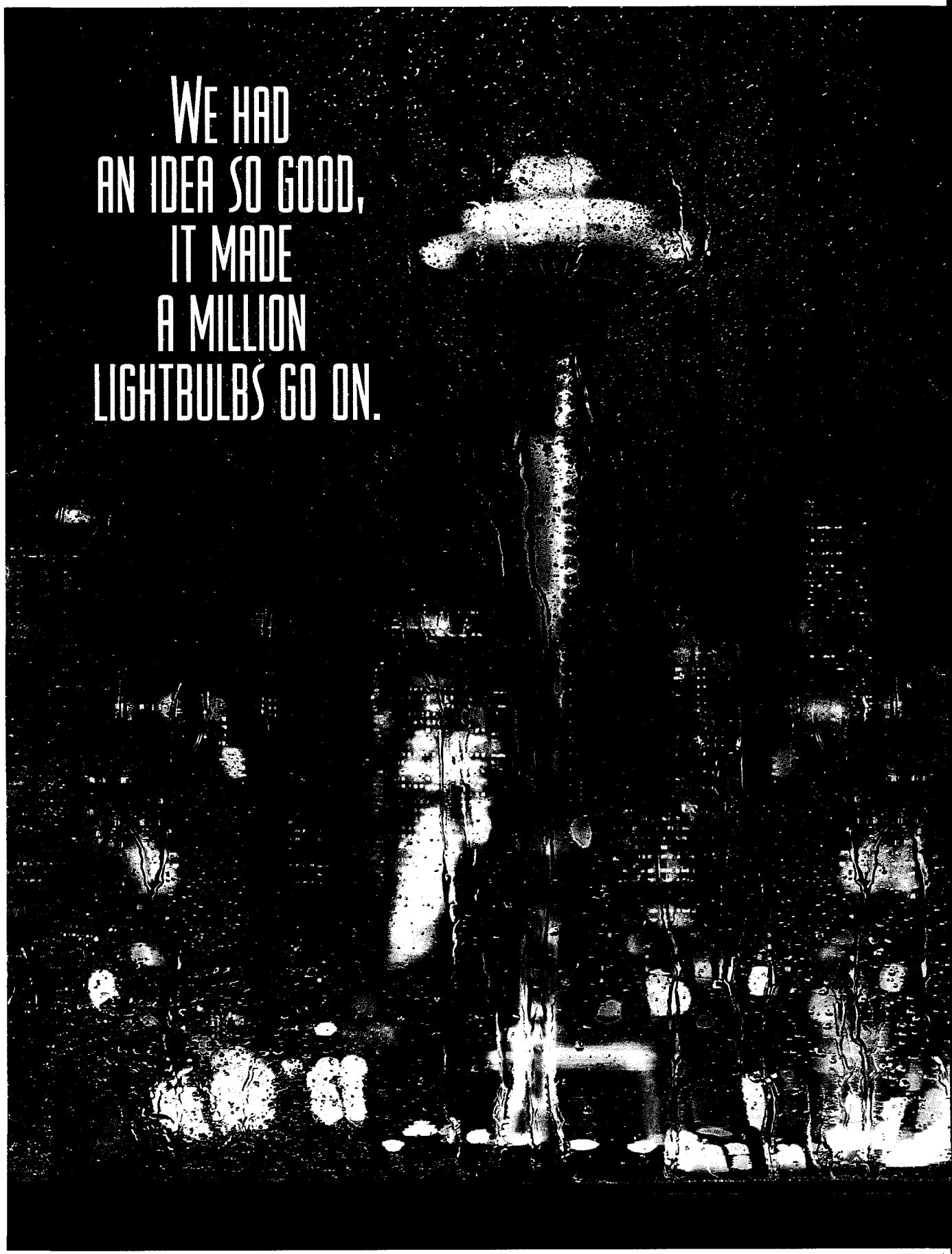

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In this mendacious retelling, the *Amistad* affair becomes a tale of multicultural collaboration, and thus a predictable reflection of the present rather than a meaningful window on the past.

Like many of the conservative critics who wrote about the film, Edith J. Martin believes she has found the surest sign of Spielberg's political agenda: his suppression of the fact that Cinqué trafficked in slaves upon his return to Africa. Her source is Samuel Eliot Morison, who made this claim not only in the book she cites but also in his *Oxford History of the American People*. "Ironic" though this epilogue may be, however, there is simply no evidence to support it; Morison apparently relied on the unsubstantiated work of another historian.

In fact, we know regrettably little about the *Amistad* captives after their homecoming. Though some remained for a time at the mission their escorts established in Sierra Leone, most hurried back to their kinsmen. There is one notable exception: the young African woman formerly called Margru, who took the name Sarah Kinson. After a few years of missionary work, Kinson returned to the United States and enrolled at Oberlin College, consummating the wishes of those who, in their evangelical zeal, had worked to free her first from her chains and then from her ignorance.

My thanks to Daniel M. Crabb and Neil Troost for their kind words.

Albert Shanker

TO THE EDITOR:

I want to comment on Chester E. Finn, Jr.'s indecent use of the late Albert Shanker to malign the teacher-union movement that he virtually created and loved [Letters from Readers, March, on Mr. Finn's review of *The Teacher Unions* by Myron Lieberman, November 1997].

Al would undoubtedly be as unmoved by Mr. Finn's saccharine "missing" of his counsel on education and foreign-policy issues as he was by Mr. Finn's occasional support of his positions when he was alive. As a deeply principled man, Al was suspicious of so-called democrats whose support of democratic institutions and political participation was highly selective. As critical as he often was of the labor movement and public education, these were the two bedrock democratic institutions to which he devoted his career. His support for them was unshakable, while Mr. Finn's is nonexistent.

Al was also wise to Mr. Finn's habit of pretending that Al's fight against totalitarianism and isolationism, his positions on improving the quality of schools and teaching, and on teacher-union reform were merely his personal perspectives rather than the policies and active work of the American Federation of Teachers. (What a feat that would have been! Al, like all AFT presidents, faced election every two years. Whom does Mr. Finn represent or answer to?)

So let the record be clear: the AFT, under Al Shanker's leadership and now mine, continues to be the leading activist for standards-based education reform and the professionalization of teaching in this nation. We also continue to be unabashed advocates of traditional trade-union concerns, such as decent salaries and working conditions and due process for our members. We continue to push for nontraditional, "break-the-mold" union practices, such as taking greater responsibility for ensuring that only first-rate teachers are hired and promoted and that incompetent teachers are helped or, failing that, removed. And let me remind Mr. Finn and others who are impatient with our progress, we do not run the schools; management does, and there is a dearth of smart partners on that side.

Mr. Finn is right on one score. We will continue to be obstacles to the radical reforms he seeks, such as vouchers, the destruction of workers' rights, and an end to our rightful participation in the political process. If that makes us a "menace," so be it.

SANDRA FELDMAN
President, American Federation of Teachers
Washington, D.C.

CHESTER E. FINN, JR. writes:

Sandra Feldman is nothing if not feisty. Testy, even. The odd thing about her ringing pronouncements concerning the AFT's singular role in American education is that she is at present negotiating a merger with the National Education Association (NEA) in which the AFT will inevitably be submerged. Odds are good that within a year or two Sandra Feldman will resurface as senior vice president of a single, vast national teachers' union, one that will—at best—retain a smidgen of interest in the non-bread-and-butter issues to which the late Albert Shanker devoted a lot of attention and to which he directed a goodly portion of the AFT's resources.

Al fought quotas while the NEA imposed them. Al criticized bilingual education while the NEA promoted it. Al saw the dangers of multiculturalism to the assimilationist mission of the public schools while the NEA pushed for more of it. Al supported teacher testing in California (and elsewhere) while the NEA fought it in court. Al insisted that student tests should have consequences (such as determining whether a person can get admitted to college) while the NEA joined the anti-testing crusade. What will the new NEA/AFT do on these and kindred issues?

As with many larger-than-life figures, Shanker's legacy will doubtless be the stuff of many arguments and countless efforts will be made to shape his place in history to various ends and interests. Will his ideas survive the Feldman-led merger? Probably not.

Sandra Feldman thinks she knows what Al Shanker thought of me. But she cannot possibly know what I thought of him, which was, of course, what I said in the reply that prompted her comments. I liked him. I respected him. On many matters I trusted him and took his advice to heart. I often disagreed with him, too. He once trounced me worse in a debate (on vouchers) than anyone before or since. But there were numerous domains in which we collaborated. At Al's invitation, for

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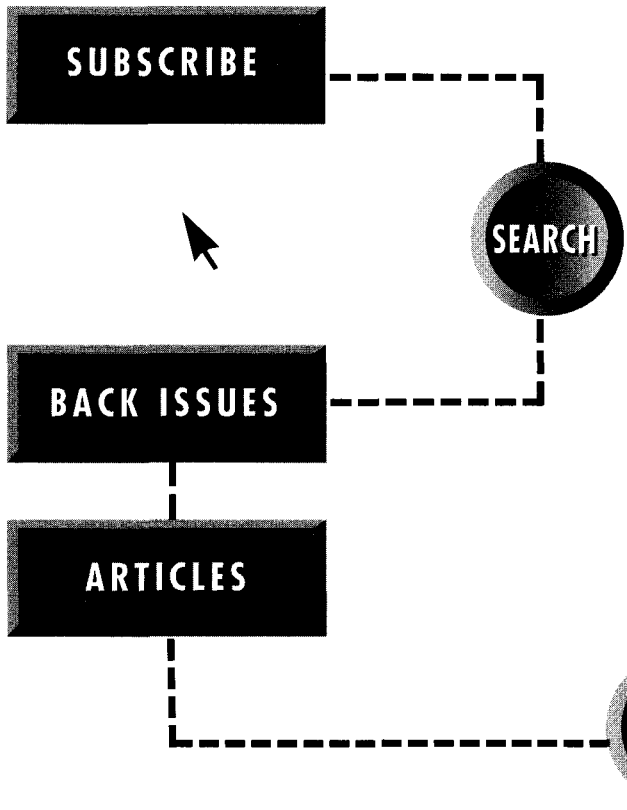

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example, I worked on a project called "education for democracy," drafting a statement of purpose and then carrying our message to (unionized) teachers in the newly free nations of Eastern Europe. We also worked together on national standards and assessment. We served together on various task forces and panels, and participated in innumerable seminars.

Sandra Feldman is not known for her interest in high standards and teacher testing, nor for her readiness to criticize the fads and trends that so distort American education. Too bad, for those were Shanker's hallmark issues.

She may control her union—at least for a little while longer. But she does not own Al Shanker's legacy. It is bigger than she is. And a little piece of it belongs to me.

Women in Japan

TO THE EDITOR:

Women are, indeed, treated differently from men in Asia, as noted by Francis Fukuyama in his excellent article, "Asian Values and the Asian Crisis" [February]. This is a great source of strength in these societies and one that women themselves, at least in Japan, have a high stake in preserving.

It is true that in Japan one does not find women in the halls of power in politics or business. Japanese women, however, are supreme in other, more important areas: first, they control the money in most families, and second, they are responsible for rearing the children, including, of course, overseeing their education. The husband is given an allowance for his daily needs, and the wife handles all other expenses, including the all-important saving for the children's education and the parents' old age. It cannot be stressed too much how important education is in Japan. I would say that it is the single most important goal of the family, since securing entrance to a good university will largely determine a child's success in finding suitable employment; and for girls, in finding a suitable mate.

Accordingly, this means that women are responsible for two closely related endeavors upon which the foundations of Japanese society (any society) are built; and this in turn gives women in Japan an enormous amount of power and prestige. The idea of Western feminists that female fulfillment resides in working in traditionally male occupations, and their almost complete lack of interest in children and child-rearing, have not taken hold in Japan. In opinion poll after opinion poll, women have made it abundantly clear that their main goal in life is to marry and have children.

What we find in Japanese society, therefore, is a clear delineation of the roles of men and women, with the latter's role often superior to that of the former. This gives Japanese women

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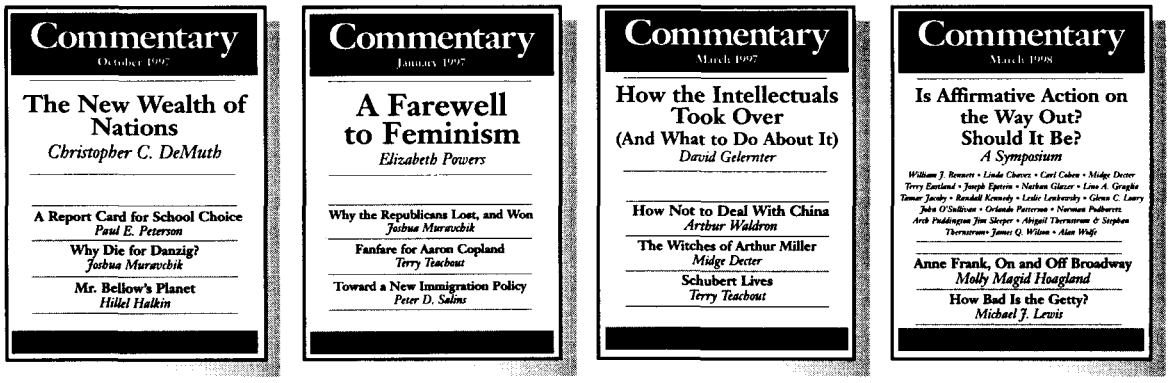

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a high stake in preserving and maintaining the status quo and will, I believe, continue to spare the country what Mr. Fukuyama calls "the social disruption that has attended economic change in the West." After all, drastic economic change has already come to Japan, and for a rather long time now.

CHET GOTTSCHALK
Sagamihara City, Japan

Affirmative Action

TO THE EDITOR:

Debates over affirmative action in college and university admissions often overlook several important facts, and COMMENTARY's symposium, "Is Affirmative Action on the Way Out? Should It Be?" [March], is no exception.

First, few who discuss *Hopwood* v. *State of Texas*, a case which, as Glenn C. Loury puts it, "forbid[s] the practice of affirmative action in college admissions," seem to know about earlier litigation, the *Adams* cases, in which those states that had had *de-jure*—or legally-enforced—systems of segregation were obligated to formulate plans to eliminate the effects of that segregation. The now-reviled dual-admissions program at the University of Texas law school that was outlawed in *Hopwood* was part of a court-approved agreement between Texas and the federal government to correct past discrimination. That discrimination was neither subtle nor covert, nor all that far in the past. It was within the professional lifetime of some current professors—1947—when the state opened Texas Southern University law school rather than permit Herman Sweatt to attend the University of Texas law school.

In fact, Dr. William S. Livingston, senior vice president of the University of Texas in Austin, was a young faculty member then. He told a reporter some time ago that Sweatt's exclusion barely caused a ripple of consciousness among the university faculty. Is it any wonder that many black and Hispanic Texans remain suspicious of the university's commitment to nondiscrimination?

In any event, it is important to realize that the unusual admissions procedures at the University of Texas law school would not have been instituted by any state that had not had a history of legally enforced segregation. That circumstance did not convince the three-judge panel of the Fifth Circuit Court that ruled in *Hopwood*, but many court observers believe it might have held sway with the court *en banc*.

Those who oppose the kind of affirmative action used by Texas as a remedy for past discrimination have an obligation, it seems to me, to propose an alternative that will ensure that African-Americans and Latinos are not shut out of the educational institutions that are key to developing minority leaders.

Another issue rarely discussed in affirmative-action debates is what the actual numbers are. Dr. Michael Nettles, a professor of education at the University of Michigan and one of the top researchers of the educational experience of African-Americans, has found that of the nation's 1,808 four-year colleges and universities, only about 120 can be considered "serious affirmative-action" institutions. The rest accept most students who apply or have not had much growth in black and Latino enrollment.

In 1985, those 120 selective institutions had a combined freshman enrollment of 119,937, rising to 126,303 in 1995. Their combined black and Hispanic freshman enrollment went from 8,897 in 1985 to 15,181 in 1995, with most of the growth (4,351) being among Hispanics. Of those black and Hispanic students, only three out of ten may have

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benefited from affirmative action, in the sense of having somewhat lower grade-point averages and standardized test scores than the median for white students.

This is hardly a picture of affirmative action run amok, with unqualified African-American and Hispanic students crowding out more qualified white students. In fact, during this period the growth in total freshman enrollment more than exceeded the growth in enrollment among African-American and Hispanic students.

Those who believe in the transformative power of colleges and universities to educate students, rather than just sort them, should make sure that the standards that count are not college and university entrance standards but their exit standards. Perhaps they could take to heart the example of little Xavier University. Historically black, Xavier recruits its students from the streets of New Orleans, not known for the high quality of its public schools. Xavier's incoming students, for the most part, do not have impressive SAT or ACT scores. And yet, because of high-quality instruction and counseling, Xavier manages to get every one of its pre-med students into medical school. Almost every African-American pharmacist in the nation is a graduate of Xavier.

What matters to those who consult a doctor or pharmacist who graduated from Xavier is not what his or her SAT score was—any more than it is important to know whether he or she walked at ten months or thirteen months. What matters is how skilled and well-educated he or she is. That is what a good university should be in the business of guaranteeing—not its incoming freshman SAT scores.

FRANK L. MATTHEWS
Publisher, Black Issues in Higher Education
Fairfax, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

Given space, I would address a number of the arguments made against affirmative action in the COMMENTARY symposium, but for the purposes of this letter, I will content myself with only one: the argument that those who have achieved good positions through affirmative action worry that people will think they have not earned their position. As Joseph Epstein writes: "I cannot gauge how cynical a young African-American academic becomes when he knows that interest in him is not principally for his qualities as a scholar or a teacher but purely for his race." The error here is the white man's belief that the black man cares one whit what the white man thinks of him. If, under the auspices of affirmative action, I, a black man, become a professor of philosophy at Harvard, I will never lose a second's sleep worrying whether white people think I deserve the position.

The question is whether a man wants to achieve great things or whether he wants other people to perceive that he has achieved great things. As for me, people may think what they like. I have found they tend to do so anyway, by my leave or not.

But if I am to argue in favor of affirmative action, I should make very clear the type of affirmative action I think we need. We need a program that gives disadvantaged men and women a chance—once they have decided they want that chance. This last point is so key that I think it worthwhile to spell it out in my own case.

At any time in my life I could have decided not to take this route, to remain impassive to overtures made to me by teachers and friends. It was not until I got into college—and with my SAT scores, my acceptance was undoubtedly a result of affirmative action—that I decided it was time. I began, then, to compete with people much better prepared than I, people who had had calculus in high school, people whose parents had tutored them daily all through elementary school. But disadvantaged as I had been, I was advantaged too, because I had decided I wanted the chance, and I was willing to work. I was willing to work morning, noon, and night. I was willing to work on Friday and Saturday evenings. I was willing to sleep only when I had to, to spend every minute between classes reading, writing, working, always working. And though it has only been two years since I first decided I would put forth the effort, since I first scored so poorly on my SAT scores that I did not legitimately deserve a place at the university, I have already caught up. But I needed two things: the chance *and* the desire. One would have done me no good without the other.

A disadvantaged person given the chance but without the desire will not succeed; he will never have the fortitude required to catch up. So here is the affirmative action I believe in: universities should take a number of disadvantaged students, regardless of GPA's and SAT's, with the understanding that the students have one or possibly two years to earn their spot legitimately. We (read: disadvantaged students with the desire) *can* live up to the standards—make no mistake about that. But we must be given the chance.

It has perhaps been said too often that racism is a disease in this country. One might then ask: is affirmative action the remedy? No, it is not. This is important to understand, especially for those who support it. Affirmative action will never cure the disease; it may not even help it much. But it can help to alleviate some of the symptoms. The debate over affirmative action seems to have broken into two camps—those who espouse affirmative action only and would do nothing about the underlying disease, and those who disdain affirmative action and would let this patient flail helplessly on the table, operating without administering so much as an aspirin.

Maybe affirmative action is only an aspirin, something to dull the reality of what is really there. Perhaps this is what the more noble of its opponents have recognized. But if that is the case, then let me tell you, brother, this is one patient who needs something for the pain.

JACKSON L. WHITE
Bloomington, Indiana

TO THE EDITOR:

It has been my abiding belief that the attempted redress of slavery through racial preferences was the result of Congress's lack of political fortitude to pay the price in dollars of

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doing the right thing. In the face of a public tired of costly government welfare, angered by judicially-forced busing (which nearly destroyed our public-school system and from which it has yet to recover), and fearful over the growing national debt, Congress did not have the political will to fund programs needed to provide disadvantaged blacks with the tools to compete in America. It seemed a much easier legislative choice to undo the effects of slavery by placing society's burden on guiltless and relatively powerless individuals of other races who would be excluded from schools and jobs in favor of blacks. But as we should have known (and many of us did know), this policy simply did not work.

It is therefore curious that, with the problems of slavery far from resolved some 135 years after its abolition, most of the respondents failed to discuss the issue raised by COMMENTARY's last question, namely, what public policy should replace affirmative action? This is the question that must be addressed. The contributors to your symposium, and other right-thinking and capable people, should offer their skills to find and their voices to support a prompt and proper means of dealing with slavery's ugly wake, whatever may be the expenditure of treasure.

Once a conscious commitment is made to do what must be done, the task may be found to be less daunting than it now appears. But the development of a policy to replace racial preferences is vital and urgent.

MARTIN T. GOLDBLUM
Beverly Hills, California

TO THE EDITOR:

By defining people solely with reference to their racial or ethnic group, affirmative action robs its beneficiaries of their individuality and relegates them to the status of mere fungible specimens of one group or another. The result is the reinforcement of group identification, which makes the already arduous task of demolishing the walls that divide our increasingly Balkanized society all the more difficult and thoroughly frustrates progress toward affirmative action's professed ultimate goal, a society that rewards individuals on the basis of merit.

Because this kind of affirmative action is predicated upon the belief—held, despite their protests to the contrary, even by proponents of preferences—that all members of the favored group are inferior to members of other groups in their ability to compete for these benefits, preferences are intrinsically racist. Preferences thus strengthen negative racial and ethnic stereotypes not only among those belonging to groups affected adversely but also among those they benefit.

I believe, however, that employing preferences *only* in the process of recruiting workers, students, contractors, and the like into the pool from which selections are then made on the basis of merit will eradicate these objectionable aspects of affirmative action.

Aggressive recruiting targeted at members of racial and ethnic groups that historically have not been meaningfully represented among applicants for particular jobs, educational placements, or contracts, even to the extent of providing mentoring and training services, disadvantages no one.

Granted, the employment of preferences in the recruiting process may not be philosophically pure, but the salutary results that can be expected more than compensate for any academic concern about intellectual consistency.

BARRY C. STEEL
Towson, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

Bravo to COMMENTARY for including in its symposium such principled opponents of affirmative action as Carl Cohen of the University of Michigan and Lino A. Graglia of the University of Texas, both of whom are to be commended for courageously speaking out against a system that has irremediably corrupted the cause of merit in higher education today.

Here at the University of California, Berkeley, the campaign against Proposition 209, the first anti-affirmative-action initiative on any state ballot, reached hysterical proportions. Shortly before the election was held in November 1996, the editorial board of the student newspaper, the *Daily Cal*—hardly a right-wing journal—voted in favor of the initiative on the grounds that, yes, in fact, black and Latino students had been admitted for years into the university with vastly lower grades and SAT scores than their white and Asian counterparts. This decision apparently infuriated some in the anti-209, pro-preference camp, for the day the issue of the paper announcing it hit the streets, all 5,000 copies were stolen from the newsstands.

This theft of the *Daily Cal* says a lot more about the attitude of the affirmative-action crowd than any debate ever could: in the minds of the supporters of racial and gender preferences, there should be no debate at all, since the other side is obviously wrong. Even more disgraceful were the numerous threats to the chief architects of the initiative, Thomas Wood and Glynn Custred, with the chairman of the campaign, Ward Connerly, coming in for a fair degree of outright physical intimidation as well.

Such is the climate on our campuses today that those who would dare speak out against the odiousness of mandated preferences are subject not only to verbal censure but also to outright personal abuse, which both Messrs. Cohen and Graglia have endured at their universities. It is odd indeed that the people who began the Free Speech Movement with such fanfare and publicity 35 years ago, and who are now firmly in control of our campuses, should do all they can to squelch any stirring of free speech when it comes from the opposition.

TIMOTHY SEAVEY
Berkeley, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I have long since stopped trying to fathom how giving special privileges to one group is not unconstitutional, but, alas, I am not alone. We all have our affirmative-action stories. Here is mine.

In 1987, then-Secretary of State George Shultz, while visiting the U.S. embassy in Oslo where I served as press attaché, informed the staff that the foreign service would soon "represent all Americans," and that steps were being taken to

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bring that principle into reality.

Beginning in the Reagan administration and meeting little or no resistance thereafter, what Shultz prophesized has come true with a vengeance. With the Bush administration doing little if anything to limit the scope of affirmative-action programs, and the current administration wedded to expanding them into all aspects of the foreign service, preferences now include not only admission but assignments, promotions, and even awards.

There is, however, one aspect of these programs that should give people reason to reflect. The fact remains that never in the course of my foreign-service career, which spanned more than a quarter of a century, did I ever meet an officer who would admit that he or she was a recipient of affirmative-action largesse. Most were strident in distancing themselves from such preferences. That, in my judgment, says much more than the absurd rantings of the defenders of affirmative action.

VINCENT CHIARELLO
Reston, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

Affirmative action as it has operated for three decades in the field of commercial buyer-seller relations is a fraudulent burden on American business.

In the Nixon and Carter years I was corporate head of purchasing for a household-name Fortune 500 company that had a well-deserved reputation for ethical operations. Because minority (largely black) leaders (many self-described) convinced corporate America that purchasing offices were closed to minority businessmen attempting to sell goods and services, most companies instituted programs to buy from minorities and search for overlooked minority suppliers. Unfortunately, even with our continuing full-court press, we did not run up large purchasing bills with minority businesses. We honestly could not.

Enter the politicians, who were unhappy that reality did not jibe with their preconceived notions of what was out there. I will never forget the day that top management came to me with the message that all federal marketing was dead in the water until a very prominent Congressman was satisfied with our numbers for minority purchases. But, eventually, reality bit this Congressman and others—so a new requirement was mandated: the quota, aided and abetted by the set-aside.

Thus the era of minority "ownership" began. Suddenly the hitherto invisible legions of suppliers materialized. "Ownership" was the operative word: as in, "I [the minority person] own 51 percent of the company." Ownership was almost always accepted on its face. Who was checking? Certainly not the pols and bureaucrats and certainly not the boards of directors who were proud of their affirmative-action programs.

MICHAEL W. CUNNINGHAM
Darien, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR:

In his symposium contribution, Nathan Glazer perpetuates the myth that blacks need to be admitted to prestigious universities because they are the tickets to power, wealth, and influence. The falseness of this view is confirmed by looking at the alma maters of the CEO's of Fortune 500 companies, the vast majority of whom did not receive their undergraduate degrees from Harvard, Yale, MIT, or Stanford. Instead, they were graduated from the many fine state schools around the country, perhaps from schools Mr. Glazer might not even have heard of.

As for the question of what affirmative action should be replaced with, the best answer is that provided by Thomas Sowell, who responded to a similar question as follows: "Nobody asks a surgeon operating on a cancer patient what he is going to replace the malignant tumor or cancerous growth with. He simply removes it and hopes that the body's natural mechanisms will begin the healing process."

MARK G. CASTELINO
Rutgers University
Newark, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

If the purpose of affirmative action is to give disadvantaged minorities an "equal" chance at admission to colleges, its underlying justification must be that after four years of school, these minorities will catch up to their advantaged peers. Unfortunately, this never seems to happen, since affirmative action is still used for postgraduate admissions. How many years of preferential treatment will it take until minorities can compete in a system based solely on merit?

If affirmative action cannot rectify disadvantage through education, then what is its purpose?

LARRY BARNES
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Contrary to assertions by William J. Bennett (citing William Safire's *New Political Dictionary*), John O'Sullivan, and apparently everyone else who now addresses the issue, the term "affirmative action" was officially used as early as 1935, in the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), to designate the action the National Labor Relations Board may require of any "person" it found to have committed an "unfair labor practice." Affirmative action, according to the NLRA, included measures—like "reinstatement of employees, with or without back pay"—that would "effectuate policies of this Act." Following decisions by the California appellate court and the U.S. Supreme Court in 1939, the term was defined as "constructive action, rather than mere negation."

Observing the difference between the way the term was used close to or at its inception and how it is used today suggests that proponents of race, ethnic, and gender preferences are using "Newspeak" to force opponents to acknowledge—by the mere act of discussion—that such preferences are not only constructive (a dubious proposition at best) but required by law (a false proposition by any reasonable interpretation).

MERWYN R. MARKEL
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

The question of affirmative action is not whether racial and gender preferences are discriminatory, because any policy based on group affiliation is discriminatory on its face, but whether or not the state, uni-

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versity, government agency, etc. has any compelling interest in discriminating for or against any sector of the population. Opponents of affirmative action, and I would place myself among them, maintain that no compelling interest exists to justify this sort of discrimination; advocates of preferences claim that they are needed to remedy past discrimination and promote diversity. Yet all this does is aggravate the situation: more discrimination as a solution for past discrimination.

Moreover, the question of diversity clouds the affirmative-action issue as a whole. Advocates of race and gender preferences turn diversity into a one-dimensional concept based solely on skin color and gender. This makes all thought and action dependent on race and gender and coerces conformity of opinion, not allowing for dissenting voices. Assessing people according to group affiliation, and giving preferences to some groups at the expense of others, only serves to reinforce negative and prejudicial stereotypes that affirmative-action programs sought to dissolve.

We do not need to mend a policy based on the Orwellian hypocrisy that the cure for discrimination is more discrimination, or an understanding of diversity that serves to enforce conformity and stifle dissenting opinions with hysterical accusations of racism and sexism. What is needed is a policy that validates individual merit and achievement.

If we continue to implement affirmative-action programs that view opportunity as a zero-sum game and grant access solely according to group affiliation, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain any notion of democracy, equality, social cohesion, or just plain tolerance in the United States. Then all people will lose, regardless of race, religion, and gender, and regardless of the best intentions and efforts of the advocates of affirmative-action preferences.

SCOTT GLOTZER
William Paterson University
Passaic, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

"Affirmative action," a phrase with "just about as much falsity as one could hope to pack into seventeen letters of the English alphabet," in Joseph Epstein's memorable words, has never been the issue: racial preference is the issue. But information about how preferences operate in the real worlds of education, business, and government is extremely difficult and costly to obtain. It is also information that many social scientists and others do not especially wish to obtain for fear of what they might find, as Norman Podhoretz perceptively states. Those who operate such programs are even less forthcoming, and, in my personal experience, downright hostile to inquiries on this subject.

Yet the information gap is slowly closing. I am proud to have co-authored several of the Center for Equal Opportunity's studies on racial preferences that were cited by the center's president, Linda Chavez, in her symposium contribution. These studies provide information heretofore hidden from public view on how racial preferences operate in the real world. At the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, for example, we found that admission was denied to at least 500 white students a year with both test scores *and* grades better than those of the median accepted black applicant. This pattern is consistent for the three years for which we have data, and I see every reason to assume that it has existed for a much longer time.

These are specific, palpable acts of reverse discrimination, which is what affirmative action has mutated into. Individuals with lesser qualifications receive offers of admission, jobs, and contracts because of the color of their skin, or what Carl Cohen has called "naked racial preference." It is to be hoped that growing public awareness of the immense damage caused by racial preferences will in the end lead to the abolition of racial-preference programs once and for all.

ROBERT LERNER
Rockville, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

The set of twenty statements on affirmative action is magnificent. Each writer presents his points concisely, and together they show the full range of arguments pro and con. I read the symposium carefully, twice, and came out agreeing with the cons. Although sympathizing with the need to help blacks, I must reluctantly conclude that affirmative-action-*cum*-preference is not an acceptable strategy. It does some good, but necessarily does pervasive harm. It gives practical help, but at the expense of eroding some of our most basic principles. All in all, the COMMENTARY symposium is a major contribution to the debate on affirmative action.

WILLIAM A. SHURCLIFF
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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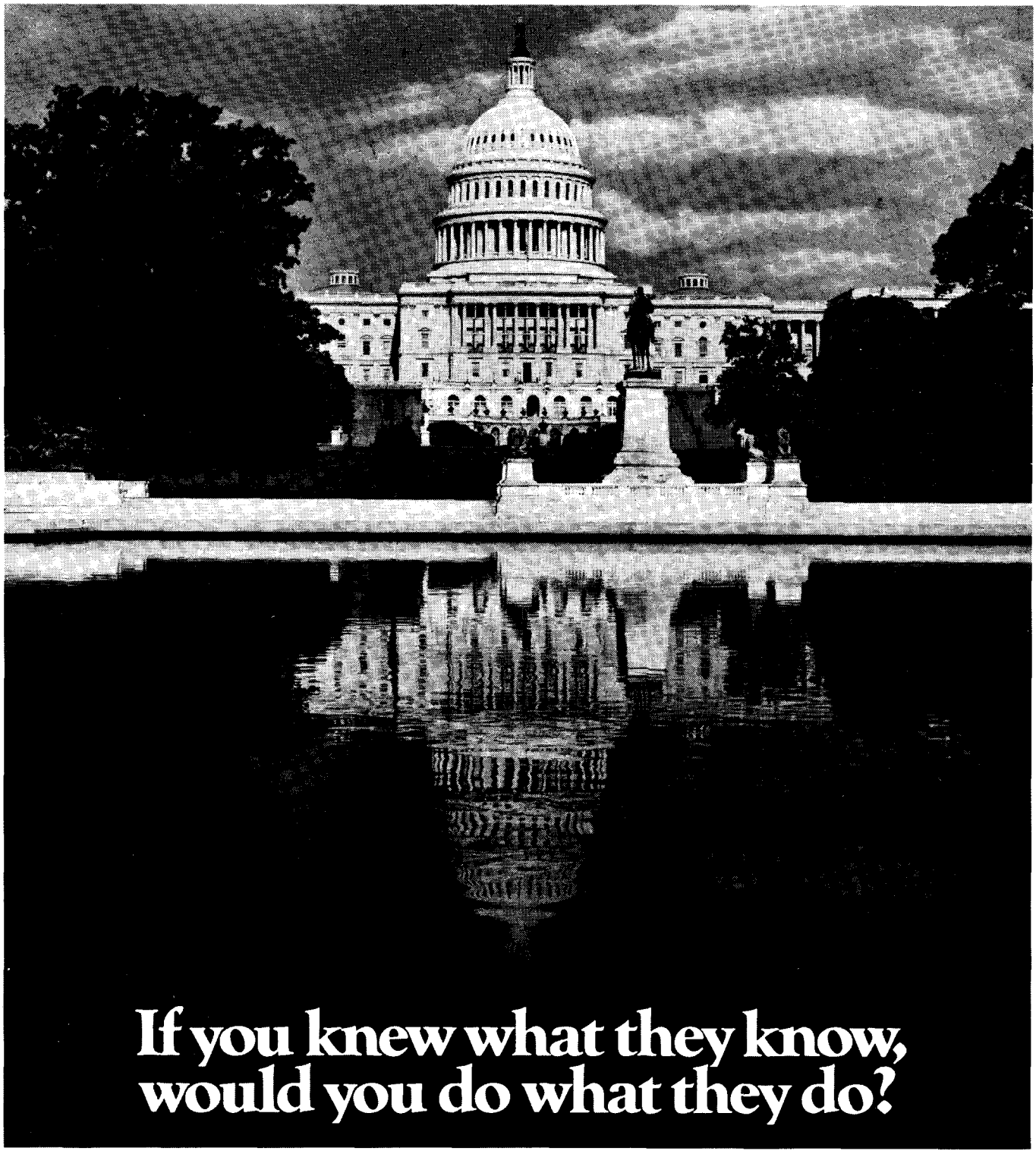

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Commentary
June 1998

"Sexgate," the Sisterhood, and Mr. Bumble

Norman Podhoretz

"CONFUSION WORSE confounded" is the phrase I would choose to summarize what has been generated by the story of the Clinton sex scandals and how various sectors of American society have responded to them. These sectors include, most prominently, the women of the feminist sisterhood; the men who give them moral and political support; the lawyers who fight for and against them in the courts; the conservatives who oppose them (or should); and the "American people," as defined by what they tell the pollsters and what the pollsters then tell us they told them.

TO START with the feminists: everybody but they themselves, and even one or two of them, says that they were discredited. And in a limited sense (though exactly how limited remains to be seen) everybody is right. How discredited? Let us refresh our memories by going back to the beginning, the better to count the ways.

In 1991, when Anita Hill, a middle-class black woman and a graduate of the Yale Law School, proclaimed that she had been sexually harassed by her former boss, Clarence Thomas, she was instantly given the benefit of every doubt by her sisters in the feminist movement. It cut no ice with them that she failed to produce any evidence to back up her tale about the coke can bearing a strand of his pubic hair that she claimed Thomas had left on her desk, or about *Long Dong Silver*, a pornographic film he had supposedly described to her in all its salacious detail. Nor were the feminists in the least discomfited when it emerged that Hill had been willing and even eager to continue working for Thomas even after he had allegedly begun harassing her in these curious ways. Nor did it bother them that she never reported Thomas at the time, that she asked him to take her along when he changed jobs, and that for years after leaving his employ she made many efforts to remain in contact with him. Anita Hill leveled her accusations at Clarence Thomas, he denied them unequivocally, and without missing a beat or waiting for the hearings to reveal what they might reveal—or then paying any attention to what they did reveal—the feminists decided that she was telling the truth and that he was telling a lie. Period.

Of course, to the extent that the objective being pursued by Anita Hill and the feminist sisterhood was to prevent Clarence Thomas from getting a seat on the Supreme Court, it failed. But losing that skirmish was a small price to pay for the great strategic victory in the larger war the feminists were fighting to legitimize and popularize their concept of "sexual harassment." Thanks to Anita Hill, this concept was given so mighty a push that it leaped almost overnight from the arcane lucubrations of marginal academics into the very center of our mainstream culture. The feminist sisterhood vocif-

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erously repeated over and over again when the Thomas hearings were going on that men just "didn't get it." But along with the many women, mostly located in the working class, whose consciousness had not previously been raised, men in all classes certainly ended up getting it by the time those hearings were over.

So much so that, from that moment on, the entire male sex, as it often seemed, genuflected without let-up before the imperatives flowing from what the feminists regarded as sexual harassment. Politicians were, for obvious reasons, the most given to this kind of cravenness, but they were by no means alone. Nor was it restricted to mere professions of rhetorical agreement with the feminist definition of sexual harassment. Not by a long shot. In the post-Anita Hill period, wherever men exercised power—as legislators, judges, employers, administrators, deans, and even military leaders—they began rushing to translate the new revelation they had experienced into laws, codes, and regulations, and to enforce them with a zealotry not seen in America since the days of the Salem trials.

The traditional ways in which women had in the past protected themselves from unwelcome advances—ranging across the spectrum of determination and finality from the polite rejection to the evasive action to the insulting putdown to the slap in the face to the knee in the groin—were no longer considered sufficient. Now the only approved tactic was for the woman to complain to the relevant authority, whereupon the man, usually denied the presumption of innocence and tried before what one such victim accurately described as a "kangaroo court," could be fired from a job or expelled from a college or, where the law was graciously tempered with mercy, sent off to undergo a novel form of brainwashing known as "sensitivity training."

This resurrected Victorian cad in modern dress could also be sued for damages, and so could the organization for which he worked. To avoid the trouble and expense and bad publicity such suits would bring, businesses and other organizations accused of being insufficiently rigorous in the promulgation or enforcement of their anti-harassment policies began making preemptive offers of financial compensation to the self-proclaimed female victims or accepting huge out-of-court settlements. In what looked to my naive eyes like a form of legal extortion, hundreds of millions of dollars were paid out to female employees past and present who pleaded damage to their self-esteem and other injuries to their psyches that no one had ever heard of before.

There seemed no lengths to which this process would not go, and no slowing down of the speed at which it metastasized its way through the body politic. At one extreme—surpassing even the cases of the poor sap kicked out by the Miller Brewing Company for mentioning a *Seinfeld* episode about masturbation to a female fellow worker; or of the fire chief who got into trouble because his fire house had a pinup calendar on the wall; or of the man who was taken to court for keeping a picture of his bikini-clad wife on his desk—a boy of seven was actually charged with sexual harassment and suspended from school for planting a kiss on the cheek of a little girl in his class.

Since the nation had not yet gone entirely mad, this last absurdity was laughed out of existence, and even the feminist sisterhood was embarrassed by it. Not so, however, with regard to the other extreme, which was reached in the military. There, anyone who exercised authority over a woman could now be demoted and fined for sexual harassment if he so much as leered at her; and if she thereupon agreed to engage in sex with him (or even if she had solicited it herself), he could be charged with various degrees of "sexual misconduct" and sent to prison for many long years. No one laughed when these provisions were imposed on the military by the feminist likes of Representative Patricia Schroeder, then on the House Armed Services Committee. On the contrary: I suspect that, like me, many people saw the whole ugly business as itself a kind of rape perpetrated by politicians on the military.

IT WAS in this cultural context that Paula Jones first popped up with a story which in 1993—that far-off age of innocence—still seemed unfit for publishing in what used to be called a family newspaper or for broadcasting on the news shows of the major television networks. To be more precise, and to be fair to her, it was not Jones herself who "broke" this story, but articles in the *American Spectator* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Yet fearing that people might think she had been "asking for it" (to use the term that would have been invoked in the pre-Anita Hill period before we had all learned better), Jones decided to go public with her own account.

The particular "it" for which she might or might not have been asking allegedly occurred in 1991 when Jones, as a low-level employee of the state of Arkansas, was working at a registration desk in the lobby of a Little Rock hotel where Governor Bill Clinton was scheduled to make a speech. At some point during the afternoon she was told by a state trooper that the Governor wanted to see her in his private suite upstairs. Her version of the sequel was

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summed up about seven years later in the decision by Judge Susan Webber Wright quashing the civil lawsuit that Jones had eventually launched against Bill Clinton, who was by now President of the United States:

> Thinking that it was an honor to be asked to meet the Governor and that it might lead to an enhanced employment opportunity, plaintiff states that she agreed to the meeting. . . . She states that a few minutes of small talk ensued. . . . [T]he Governor then "unexpectedly reached over to [her], took her hand, and pulled her toward him. . . ."

After a bit of groping at her thighs and breasts, according to her "all without her consent," Jones informed Clinton that she was "not that kind of girl." This did not impress or deter the Governor, who "approached the sofa where she had taken a seat and, as he sat down, 'lowered his trousers and underwear, exposed his penis (which was erect) and told [her] to kiss it.'" When she refused, "the Governor, 'while fondling his penis,' said, 'Well, I don't want to make you do anything you don't want to do.'"

Like Clarence Thomas before him, Clinton denied that any such event had ever taken place. But there all resemblance between the two cases comes to an end. So far as anyone then knew, or knows to this day, Thomas had never previously engaged in the type of behavior of which Anita Hill accused him. Clinton, by contrast, had already become so notorious for his sexual escapades that during his campaign for the presidency, a special staff person named Betsey Wright had been assigned to deal with the "bimbo eruptions" that everyone around him fully expected to occur.

The most troublesome such eruption involved Gennifer Flowers, who presented tapes on which Clinton was heard advising her to deny the long affair she said she had had with him. Clinton, accompanied and vehemently backed up by his wife, then went on national television to deny the affair himself. We have since learned from his sworn deposition in the Jones case that he was lying about Gennifer Flowers. Yet even in the absence of such proof, and even though the voters twice decided to elect him President anyway, Clinton—again in sharp contrast to Clarence Thomas with regard to Anita Hill—had already established himself as the kind of man who might well have done what Paula Jones accused him of doing.

There was even less resemblance between the attitude of the feminist sisterhood toward Anita Hill and the way it treated Paula Jones. Edmund Burke, lamenting the death of chivalry, once thundered that a thousand swords should have leaped from their scabbards to prevent Queen Marie Antoinette from being dragged to the guillotine by a mob of French revolutionaries. Just so—considering the totally credulous and even reverential backing Hill had enjoyed from the sisterhood, as well as the relentless insistence with which it had subsequently pressed forward in its great crusade against sexual harassment—one might have anticipated that a deafening clatter of feminist keyboards would fill the American air in support of Paula Jones. But no more than one or two could be heard throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Remaining silent was bad enough from the point of view of the putative principles of the feminist movement. But some members of the sisterhood went further, expressing the same dismissive attitude toward Jones's story that they themselves had scoffed at as a form of "not getting it" where Anita Hill had been concerned. Even Betty Friedan, the godmother of contemporary feminism, blasphemed against the sacred dogma of the movement that "the personal is political" when she suddenly discovered in herself an abhorrence of "the use of a sexual issue in this way." Besides, Friedan huffed, Paula Jones "wasn't killed, she wasn't harassed, she wasn't fired"—quite as though Anita Hill's body lay a-moldering in its grave or was now sprawling jobless on a street in Washington, D.C.

Departing still further from what was supposed to be their own sense of the realities of life, other members of the sisterhood even derided Jones—sometimes almost in so many words, sometimes by implication—as nothing but a piece of Southern white trash looking to make a buck. They could not even bring forth a bit of indignation when Clinton's smearer-in-chief, the egregious James Carville, came crawling out of the sewer that seems to be his natural habitat to shake off Jones with the ineffably cruel remark that when you "drag a $100 bill through a trailer park, . . . there's no telling what you'll find."

At least some of this anti-Jones activity, be it well noted, occurred before she was taken up and financed by a conservative legal organization. Which is to say that the feminists had refused to rally around her even when they had no real basis for suspecting her of being an instrument of the "vast right-wing conspiracy" against Clinton that the President's wife would later conjure up to such great effect.

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Yet even if Jones had been adopted by conservatives from the first minute, the feminists should by their own lights *still* have sprung to her defense as readily and as rapidly and as unquestioningly as they had done with Anita Hill. Hath not a big-haired woman lips? Hath she not breasts, thighs, genitals, senses, affections, passions? If you prick her, doth she not bleed?

Evidently not—and especially not if she also dresses like "trailer trash." Quoth Barbara Ehrenreich who, writing in *Time*, was one of the very few feminists to dissent from the rest of the movement on Paula Jones:

> Organized feminism lost valuable moral capital when it appeared to blow off Jones as a right-wing operative or conniving tramp. If sexual harassment is a crime—and it was feminists who fought to make it one—then it's just as much a crime when nice-guy Democrats do it to right-leaning women with the wrong kind of hair.

Ehrenreich, however, was a little foolish in assuming that there were any principles that "organized feminism" would put ahead of its loyalty to a Democratic President like Bill Clinton. Someone once quipped that the Jewish community was the Democratic party at prayer, and in much the same sense the feminist movement was now unmasked as the Democratic party in drag. Wherever the feminist interpretation of the interests of women served the interests of the Democrats (as with Anita Hill), it was invoked instantaneously and with a fury that could shake a nation. But that interpretation simply had to take a back seat whenever it ran counter to the interests of the Democrats (as with Paula Jones).

On this issue, Noemie Emery, in a piece in the *Weekly Standard*, was as realistic as Barbara Ehrenreich was naive. "The feminists," declared Emery,

> stand exposed as a partisan pressure group, which is not what they said they were. They said they were a universal moral movement acting on behalf of all women. They claimed, very loudly, that harassment was an outrage and a horror. But as it turns out, they are for women selectively, and against harassment only now and then. It was never a principle—merely a hammer, a tool used to bludgeon political enemies.

Every word of this was true, and yet not even Emery saw quite how far the partisanship went and how narrowly focused it was. After all, Senator Robert Packwood had been bludgeoned by the same "hammer" in spite of the fact that he had been as faithful a follower of the feminist agenda as Bill Clinton himself. Moreover, the acts of harassment he was charged with (mostly lunging drunkenly at female staffers and trying to get them to kiss him—on the lips, it seems necessary to add) were pathetically infantile as compared to what Clinton was accused of doing to Paula Jones. As a Republican, however, Packwood simply did not qualify for a free pass (in either sense of the word).

BUT EVEN the "moral capital" lost by the sisterhood through Paula Jones proved to be chump change as measured by the plunge its stock took in the wake of its handling of the most sensational bimbo eruption of them all. This was the one featuring Monica Lewinsky, who was heard on tape confiding to her friend Linda Tripp that as a White House intern then barely into her twenties, she had earned her "presidential knee pads" by repeatedly servicing Clinton in the Oval Office (or the Oral Office, as it came to be called in one of the hundreds of jokes spawned by this great gift to all late-night comedians).

Again Clinton, following his own spurned advice to Flowers, issued denial after denial, and again he was backed up by his wife. But this time he was also backed up by the object of his extramarital attentions. Ingrate that he was in referring to Lewinsky as "that woman," she had sworn in a deposition that she had never had sex with the President. In doing so, she contradicted everything she had told Linda Tripp. She also flew in the face of all the evidence (such as, among many other details and circumstances, the 37 otherwise inexplicable visits she made to the White House after being transferred to the Pentagon) that led practically everyone to doubt her deposition. Practically everyone also believed that her denial in this deposition had been purchased by the job offers she had received from Clinton's UN ambassador (who had actually visited this lowly intern for the purpose of summoning her to be interviewed) and from companies like Revlon and American Express on whose board the President's close friend Vernon Jordan sat.

"Practically everyone" included the feminists. Yet they were reluctant to admit it. Some of them took refuge in the White House line that the "facts" had not yet all come out. But very few if any feminists not on the administration's payroll had the nerve or the gall to travel the whole distance in expressing confidence that when the light was finally trained on all these obscure facts (which, they conveniently neglected to notice, remained obscure only because Clinton refused to

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divulge them), the President would be vindicated. The most they could work themselves up into doing was to pretend that they were responsibly refusing to rush to judgment. "What is important for the American people to know," intoned Senator Barbara Boxer, Democrat of California, "is that there is a process in place to deal with these allegations." But so blatantly in conflict was this ploy with the storming-around by Senator Boxer herself during the "process" that was then "in place to deal" with the allegations against Clarence Thomas that uttering such words should have brought a blush to her cheeks if only there were shame enough in her to supply the color.

The hypocrisy here was seen and then raised by the outright dishonesty of yet another ploy. This amazing tactic, adopted by feminists no less fiery than Gloria Steinem, Susan Faludi, and Susan Estrich, was to stipulate that the President had probably had an affair with Monica Lewinsky but then to argue—with a straight face, yet—that what had transpired between them did not amount to an offense against feminist principle. Unlike the Boxer tactic, the Steinem-Faludi-Estrich maneuver did bring a blush, if not to their own cheeks, then to the cheeks of a number of their followers and admirers.

One of these was Marjorie Williams, who in the piece she did for *Vanity Fair* expressed her "fury" at the failure of many of her sisters and fellow Democrats to protest the trashing of Lewinsky's reputation by the White House, and instead to pile on themselves. For instance, she quoted Faludi's derisive description of Lewinsky as "sleeping her way to the bottom of the Revlon empire." Williams also quoted Estrich, the well-known feminist law professor, who was even more sarcastic than Faludi:

> Lewinsky at least appears to have flirted her way to a job at Revlon and, when that disappeared, a $2-million modeling offer and the status of the most-sought-after woman in the world. Not bad, some might say, for someone who can't type.

But the most startling statement of all was a piece on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* by Gloria Steinem, co-godmother of contemporary feminism and its famously pretty face. Probably taking her cue from an earlier article on the same page by the self-proclaimed creator of the law of sexual harassment, Catharine MacKinnon (about whom more in a minute), Steinem wrote that even if "all the sexual allegations now swirling around the White House turn out to be true"—and "for the sake of argument" she was willing to accept that they were—Clinton was not guilty of sexual harassment. Why? Because, unlike Clarence Thomas and Bob Packwood, the President had taken no for an answer from Paula Jones and Kathleen Willey (about whom more in a minute as well), and yes for an answer from Monica Lewinsky. Hence he was following "the commonsense guideline to sexual behavior that came out of the women's movement 30 years ago: no means no; yes means yes."

Along with most other readers of this piece, male and female alike, I had to rub my eyes. Could Steinem be serious in saying that *this* was what the women's movement had been telling us all along? If so, she had clearly been struck with the same bout of amnesia that had come over Susan Estrich, who seemed to have forgotten what she herself had written back in 1987: "Many feminists would argue that so long as women are powerless relative to men, viewing 'yes' as a sign of true consent is misguided." There was also the ferocious *littérateuse* Andrea Dworkin, again in 1987: "Physically, the woman in intercourse is a space inhabited, a literal territory occupied literally: occupied even if there has been no resistance, no force; even if the occupied person said yes please, yes hurry, yes more."

Admittedly, Dworkin was more radical than most of her sisters, not too many of whom could talk themselves into accepting her idea that no essential difference existed between normal heterosexual intercourse and rape. Yet being so far-out did not prevent Dworkin from exerting an enormous influence over the thinking of her less radical sisters about the nature of rape. In the past, rape had meant imposing sex upon an unwilling woman by the threat or the use of physical force. But with more than a little help from the writings of Dworkin, force had been removed from the equation, or else was defined so expansively as to include a whole range of actions that traditionally fell under the rubric of courtship, verbal cajolery, and seduction.

Under this unprecedentedly elastic definition, not even a woman's uncoerced consent necessarily precluded the charge of rape (not to mention the lesser offense of harassment). In "Non-Violent Sexual Coercion," a paper included in a much-circulated collection called *Acquaintance Rape: The Hidden Crime*, two feminist academics explained why yes so often meant no and why an apparently voluntary act of sexual intercourse could be equated with rape:

> There could be many reasons why a woman might not resist a man's advances so that un-

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wanted intercourse could occur without force. The woman may fear that resisting will make the man violent. She may be confused. Her socialization may make it difficult for her to resist.

There was a time, then, when Gloria Steinem and Susan Estrich and Susan Faludi and every other self-respecting member of the sisterhood would almost certainly have regarded Monica Lewinsky's going down on her knees in more ways than one to Bill Clinton as a perfect case in point (particularly if the President involved had been a Republican). And even if the enthusiasm Lewinsky expressed over the great privilege of servicing Clinton sexually were to have made these feminists reluctant to call it rape, they would never before have hesitated for a second to call it sexual harassment.

After all, Lewinsky's affair with the President satisfied in every jot and tittle the criteria of sexual harassment that the feminist movement had forced American society to accept. For openers, this new affair had been conducted in the workplace, which feminists had labored long and mightily and successfully to establish as an area where the mere telling of an off-color joke could get a man fired and his company sued for damages. But, in what should have been an even more compelling consideration from the feminist point of view, the sex Lewinsky had engaged in with the President had been between a boss—indeed, the boss of all bosses—and the most subordinate of all his subordinates. In sum, Barbara Ledeen of the Independent Women's Forum—a group highly critical of the official feminist sisterhood—was entirely right when she told Marjorie Williams that "The CEO of a corporation wouldn't have had time to pack up his briefcase before he was fired" for doing what the President of the United States had done with Monica Lewinsky.

Yet this was not the position most orthodox feminists took on Clinton and Lewinsky. "If anything," sneered Susan Faludi in exoneration of the President, "it looks like she put the moves on *him*." Seconding the motion, Katha Pollitt of the *Nation* added that "there's no evidence that Monica Lewinsky was bullied or coerced or intimidated into sex and quite a bit of evidence that she was a willing, even eager, participant." And then Gloria Steinem, keeper of the feminist *imprimatur*, made it official by absolving Clinton on the ground that Lewinsky had said yes.

Besides proving too much even for several prominent members of the sisterhood, Steinem's piece was a godsend to the critics of the organized feminist movement who naturally seized on this golden opportunity to expose the almost incredible inconsistency and hypocrisy manifested here. Fortunately for the movement, however, a number of men rushed chivalrously forward to defend its own principles against Steinem, to whom, as the syndicated columnist Richard Cohen earnestly confided, he had "looked . . . over the years for cues, advice, and just plain wisdom." Another male columnist, A.M. Rosenthal of the *New York Times*, paid his own, though thankfully less enthusiastic, respects to Steinem but then proceeded, as did Cohen, to express not just disappointment but even anger at the position she was now taking on the issue of sexual harassment.

WHICH BRINGS me back to the role that men have played in relation to the feminist movement both in the past and now with regard to the Clinton sex scandals.

Anyone paying attention to these matters over the years was bound to have become aware that the feminists' success in infecting our culture with their ideas about the relations between men and women owed an immeasurable debt to the supine acquiescence of most men themselves in the sisterhood's assault upon the entire male sex as nothing but oppressors and predators. And I mean supine: scarcely a male voice was raised in protest when feminists issued such proclamations as this by Susan Brownmiller: "Rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear" (the italics were *all hers*). Or this one by the editor of the *Journal of Sexual Assault and Coercion*: "Rape is not that different from what we see as socially acceptable or socially laudable male behavior." Or the even more outlandishly outrageous one I have already quoted above from the mother of all feminist enemies of men, Andrea Dworkin.*

In bowing their heads humbly while such accusations were being hurled against them, men were being "wimps," to adopt the epithet the feminists themselves were wont to use whenever they were in a mood to complain about the difficulty they had in finding husbands or even a member of the opposite sex willing to "commit" short of marriage. (Naturally, they could perceive no connection between the mysterious disappearance of eligible and/or desirable male prospects and their own ideas and behavior.)

* For further details, see my article "Rape in Feminist Eyes," COMMENTARY, October 1991.

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Yet no one would ever have taken Cohen or Rosenthal for a wimp. Rosenthal especially had shown much courage over the years in challenging accepted orthodoxies on a wide range of subjects. This was why I would have expected him, as well as the not-always-kneejerk liberal Cohen, to use Steinem's piece as a good occasion for raising questions about the validity of the feminist doctrine of sexual harassment and other key ideas of the movement. But no, what they both did was reaffirm these ideas by chastising *her* for being unfaithful to them—and just when the intellectual and moral weaknesses that had been there from the beginning had revealed themselves for all to see.

What especially riled Cohen was the case—getting now, as promised, to her—of Kathleen Willey. A long-time supporter and friend of the President, Willey, Cohen wrote,

> had come to ask [Clinton] for a job. She and her husband were broke; Edward Willey, Jr. would in fact commit suicide that very day. It's hard to imagine a woman in a more vulnerable position. . . . You cannot, you dare not, you must not make a pass at a woman who has come to you for a job. Everyone knows that. . . . It is that awesome imbalance of power that, in [Clarence] Thomas's case, caused so many women to wail their outrage at what he was accused of doing. But where are their voices when it comes to Clinton? Silent.

Actually, Cohen was being premature in complaining about feminist silence over Kathleen Willey, since it would be broken a few days later after her appearance on *60 Minutes*. Willey was an elegant and well-spoken woman, entirely different in social standing and demeanor from the tacky likes of Gennifer Flowers and Paula Jones and even Monica Lewinsky (who, though an upper-middle-class girl from Beverly Hills, was, as Marjorie Williams could not resist unkindly characterizing her, "a creature from an Aaron Spelling show"). As a Democratic supporter of Clinton, Willey was also above the suspicion of being an instrument of the "vast right-wing conspiracy."

Faced with such a woman, a few leading members of the sisterhood finally got over the "laryngitis" that Barbara Ehrenreich had attributed to them and recaptured the use of their normally raucous voices. The most highly publicized instance was Patricia Ireland, the current head of the National Organization for Women (NOW), who conceded that if the President really had groped Willey and put her hand on his genitals, he was guilty of the crime of sexual assault: "Now we're talking about, really, sexual predators and people who in positions of power use that power to take advantage of women."*

If it was Kathleen Willey who was the cause of Richard Cohen's disappointment with Gloria Steinem, for A.M. Rosenthal it was Paula Jones. Rosenthal, who blamed the premature death of his own older sister many years earlier on her encounter with a flasher on the street, was fit to be tied when one of the grounds on which Judge Susan Webber Wright threw out Jones's lawsuit was that even if Clinton had exposed himself to her, the act did not rise to the level of an "outrage" as that term was defined by the law. This provoked enough outrage in Rosenthal—and not only in Rosenthal—to make up for the lack of it in Judge Wright's decision.

And so we come to the lawyers: the third group of people who have not only sown their share of confusion about the Clinton sex scandals but have played a large role in the evolution and dissemination of feminist ideas about the relations between men and women.

As it happens, I think Judge Wright was right to throw Paula Jones's case out of court. But I think so only because Jones failed to present any plausible evidence of having suffered any damage through her brush with Clinton. My own guess is that this encounter took place, possibly even as she described it. I would also guess that Jones knew very well what she was letting herself in for when she entered Clinton's room in that hotel, but that she then changed her mind because his approach was so precipitous and so gross that, even if we assume (which I do not) that she really was the "conniving tramp" and "slut" that Clinton's defenders said she was, she might well have been insulted and turned off by it.

But whatever may or may not have happened in that hotel suite, I find it deplorable that the conservative lawyers who took up Jones's cause relied on the very feminist ideas about sexual discrimination and harassment they should, as conservatives, have been trying to fight. I realize that they may have had no viable legal alternative to this strategy; but if so, they should have stayed away

* Willey, however, lost a goodly amount of credibility with Ireland and the others when the White House countered by releasing a number of complimentary letters she had written to the President after the alleged incident had occurred. Here was another show of hypocrisy, since needless to say, similar gestures by Anita Hill toward Clarence Thomas had been explained away by the sisterhood.

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from Jones altogether. At least then they would have been spared any need to peddle the newly invented disease of "sexual aversion" that she had allegedly been suffering from ever since Clinton exposed himself to her. Therefore I also applaud Judge Wright for giving the back of her judicial hand to the "purported expert with a Ph.D. in education and counseling" who had made this preposterous diagnosis.

But here is where the applause has to stop and the booing must begin. For in deciding that, even if Paula Jones were telling the truth, Clinton's behavior toward her did not rise to the level of what the law considers an "outrage," Judge Wright reconfirmed an old dictum that many of us have come to recall in this age of criminal trials like that of O. J. Simpson and a thousand civil cases in which ridiculous claims of damage have been first sustained and then reversed and then reversed again. The original author of this dictum was Mr. Bumble in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, and it consisted of seven little words: "the law is a ass—a idiot." Mr. Bumble let loose with this immortal outburst upon being instructed that "the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction." But I feel sure that if he were still with us today, he would agree that his dictum applies with equal pertinence to what "the law supposes" about sexual harassment.

Having just read about a dozen articles and learned papers on this subject, I confess that I am even more confused about what the law is than I was before I started. But my confusion is a form of blazing clarity as compared with the law itself. No one seems able to provide a simple and coherent definition of sexual harassment, and things have been made even murkier by the crazy inconsistencies between the decisions of judges and juries from one case to another.

In one of its multifarious aspects, sexual harassment is just another form of discrimination in employment, and as such is forbidden under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.* But there is little agreement on the question of when such discrimination against women in the workplace can be said to have taken place. So-called "quid-pro-quo" sex, or what the leading feminist legal poohbah Catharine MacKinnon—arriving at last to her—translates as "put out or get out," is relatively easy to define; and such sexual extortion should, even in my retrograde opinion, be illegal and subject to severe punishment.† But to repeat (and it bears repeating), most feminist lawyers and legal scholars contend, or did until Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky came along, that virtually any sexual interaction between a man and a woman in the workplace—even a pass or a verbal innuendo, let alone an actual act of intercourse—constitutes harassment, and all the more so if he is higher up in the hierarchy than she.

THEN THERE is the question of when sex is "unwelcome" as opposed to "consensual," assuming that there can ever be such a thing as consensual sex on the part of women. As Jeffrey Toobin wrote in the *New Yorker*:

> MacKinnon has long argued that in a patriarchal society, the notion of consent has no real meaning for women. The real question, as she put it in her book, is "whether women have a chance, structurally speaking and as a normal matter, even to consider whether they want to have sex or not." In the light of the argument of her book, MacKinnon's question is clearly rhetorical. But her implication is clear: consent is a myth; all sex is harassment.

As I can testify at first hand from having made an analogous point about her idea of rape in the course of a debate with MacKinnon, she immediately begins shouting (and I mean literally) that she is being misrepresented even when one quotes from her own writings. It therefore did not surprise me when she did the functional equivalent on paper to Toobin in a letter to the *New Yorker*, and then again in a letter to the *New York Times* answering a criticism of her aforementioned op-ed piece there.

But with her *Times* piece itself, MacKinnon finally did manage to surprise me. Under some interpretations of this slippery and itself opaque law, she may have been technically correct in acquitting Clinton of harassment because Monica Lewinsky had evidently not found sex with him "unwel-

* The role of Title VII in this area was first spotted more than 25 years ago in an article by Paul Seabury in COMMENTARY ("HEW & the Universities," February 1972). In explaining how women had come to be added to blacks as beneficiaries of the then still infant regime of affirmative action in the universities, Seabury told the story of the Southern Congressman Howard Smith, who "in a fit of inspired raillery devised a perverse stratagem." This consisted of proposing "an amendment to the bill to include women as an object of federal protection in employment." Smith thought that the amendment would kill the bill, but to his surprise it passed. He thereby made another field vulnerable to even more types of mischief than Title VII was soon to do in the area of race, where its explicit prohibition of quotas was interpreted by the bureaucracies and the courts to mean the exact opposite of what it said.

† Here too, however, feminists are trying to obfuscate the issue by claiming harassment even when the woman who refuses to "put out" is not kicked out, and may, in fact, as in a case currently before the Supreme Court, even have been awarded a promotion.

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come." Still, never would I have dreamed of hearing such a verdict drip so approvingly off the lips or the pen of Catharine MacKinnon, who had often collaborated with Andrea Dworkin herself when legal ballast was needed to anchor Dworkin's demented ideas about all matters sexual.

Another lawyer, by the name of Anita Hill, also weighed in around this time. I for one had come to think of Hill as the Alger Hiss of sexual harassment—the liar who would never own up to the truth, no matter what, and whose supporters had so great a stake in the issue involved that they would defend her to the death, also no matter what. Like Hiss, too, Hill wrote in the arid style of an undistinguished legal brief, and it was in just such utterly bloodless prose that she composed a piece asking whether "we" had forgotten what sexual harassment was really about. My own answer was no: I remembered all too well that it was really about a coke can, a pubic hair, and *Long Dong Silver*. But apparently this was a false memory, since Hill now instructed us that "the laws forbidding sexual harassment in the workplace are not about sex. They are about employment discrimination."

Employment discrimination? *That* was what Anita Hill was claiming to have suffered at the hands of Clarence Thomas? The mind reels and the head spins.

In action, the law of sexual harassment has been as full of heedless inconsistencies as the writings of its self-proclaimed creator and its principal martyr. An article by John Cloud in *Time* provided the details:

> Since 1991, juries have returned over 500 verdicts on sexual harassment—decisions that often contradict one another and send mixed signals about how we should behave any time we meet a co-worker we'd like to see after five. . . . Meanwhile employers fearing lawsuits are stopping harassment before it starts.

This was what the Miller Brewing Company was trying to do when it fired that employee for talking to a female fellow worker about the *Seinfeld* episode. But to confuse matters further, he then turned the tables by suing the company, and won. Many (most?) other cases have gone the other way, and yet even some of them have been reversed on appeal only to be reversed again by a higher court.

The most consequential example here was the suit brought by one Mechelle Vinson against her boss at the Meritor Savings Bank who, she charged, had repeatedly pressured her into sex. But since she was neither demoted nor fired when she objected, she lost the case. Vinson (one of whose lawyers was none other than Catharine MacKinnon) then appealed to the Supreme Court, which in 1986 ruled in her favor on the ground that her boss had created a "hostile environment." Of this new legal construct, Thomas Sowell wrote in his syndicated column:

> Many other laws have been declared "void for vagueness" without being nearly as murky as laws about sexual harassment. When a law forbids you from doing something, it ought to be clear what it is you are not supposed to do. But when the law forbids an employer from having a "hostile environment," that can mean anything a judge and jury want it to mean.

The long list compiled by John Cloud decisively confirmed Sowell's assessment. One item told of the clerk in Montana who was awarded damages because smutty pictures passed around by her fellow workers, mostly women themselves, were adjudged to have created a hostile environment for her. In Tennessee, by contrast, after a painting of a partly nude woman displayed in a city-hall rotunda was removed because an offended employee filed a complaint, a judge decided that this violated the First Amendment. Even then, however, the city attorney in charge, with the artist's concurrence, refused to put the painting back because as a lawyer he quite reasonably feared that another judge might overrule the first one.

The law of sexual harassment, then, is indeed "a ass—a idiot." And yet that is not even the worst of it. The worst of it is that as a nation we have given judges and juries, together with committees in corporations and colleges, jurisdiction over a large and central part of life that cannot be codified in laws and written into regulatory codes without having the juice squeezed out of it. This is the part that comprises the endlessly complex rituals of courtship, the stages of flirtation, the nuances of resistance and submission, the tangled interplay between seducer and seduced. The law of sexual harassment "supposes," in Mr. Bumble's word, that the seducer is always the man and the seduced is always the woman, and he would surely have extended to this supposition the same reasoning and the same wish he applied to the notion, written into the law of his own day, that wives are always dominated by their husbands: "If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience—by experience."

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The young Leon Trotsky, before becoming a Marxist himself, once pronounced "a curse on all Marxists, and upon those who want to bring dryness and hardness into all the relations of life." For doing precisely that, the female propagators of the law of sexual harassment in America deserve to have the same curse called down upon them, just as their male fellow-travelers deserve to have Mr. Bumble's wish come true for them.

On top of taking the life out of sex, the feminist theory of harassment has injected more poison into the relations between the sexes than was ever there before (and God knows there was enough to be getting on with). It has in this way contributed in some indeterminate measure to what, if we can credit the latest medical statistics, has become a veritable plague of impotence among young males and a correlative condition of single unblessedness among young women. For all we can tell, it may also have given a push or two to the spread of that other expression of the male retreat from women known as homosexuality.

And there is still more. As the columnist Paul Greenberg has astutely observed, in substituting the law for what used to be governed by manners and morals and informal codes of socially approved or sanctioned behavior, we ensure that the "intrinsic standards that should be acquired from youth" will fade. The only questions asked will be legal ones; and anyone who is found not guilty under the law will be entitled to claim vindication, which is exactly what President Clinton did when the Paula Jones case was thrown out of court. "Your President is not a crook," Richard Nixon once notoriously announced, as though that were the whole or the only issue, and Bill Clinton has in his own area of specialization followed suit.

More's the pity, therefore, that conservatives in general did not seize on the Clinton sex scandals to attack the feminist theory of sexual harassment and to press for a rollback of the laws and regulations that have been spawned under its malignant influence. Instead, blinded by rage against Clinton and eager to take political advantage of his womanizing, some on the Right lost sight of one of the great conservative adages: that civilization depends not primarily on laws but on what a British judge once called "obedience to the unenforceable." Forgetting this, they followed Paula Jones's lawyers and columnists like Cohen and Rosenthal in rushing to defend the very positions abandoned (for the moment, anyway) by Gloria Steinem, Catharine MacKinnon, Anita Hill, and the rest of their noisy and noisome tribe.

IT WAS a truly remarkable reversal of roles. First the feminists, who had previously worked so hard and with such great success in stretching the definition of sexual harassment to cover practically any pass made by any man at any woman, suddenly started singing a strictly and narrowly legalistic tune. The reason was that they wanted to do what Hillary Clinton had denied doing in 1992 when, in backing her husband's lie about Gennifer Flowers, she spoke contemptuously of the country singer Tammy Wynette's signature number: they wanted to stand by their (political) man. Then other feminists joined in the chorus with another new tune that was even more jarringly dissonant to anyone who had been listening to what the movement had been trumpeting over the years. Thus Margaret Carlson, earning herself a spot for disingenuousness in the *Guinness Book of World Records*, warbled in *Time*:

> Feminists didn't want to end sex in the workplace. After all, to paraphrase bank robber Willy Sutton, that's where the men are—not to mention where we spend most of our time. Many women want to date *up* on the organization chart and don't like the welter of regulations from the human-resources department that caution executives against it.

Yet no sooner had these new ditties reached the ears of a number of conservative commentators than they began talking as though there were great value in the laws of sexual harassment and waxing indignant over the fact that Clinton was being let off the legal hook. Among the few exceptions was John Leo, who wrote in *U.S. News & World Report*:

> Somehow, fairness and manners in the workplace have become purely legal issues, framed by the inventors of harassment doctrine, who are famously certain that all males constitute a permanently oppressing class. Judges who have gone along with all this really ought to try scaling it all back, so the serious cases of exploitation wind up in court, while acceptable levels of gossip, joking, and flirting are set by the culture of the workplace itself.

An even bigger exception was supplied by the libertarians (assuming that they can still be considered conservatives), who were represented most visibly and vocally by Cathy Young. Young both edited a report under the auspices of the Women's Freedom Network entitled "Rethinking Sexual Harassment" and published a piece in the *New York Post* under the headline "*Now* Can We Rein in Sex-Harassment Law?" in which she said:

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> Seven years after the Anita Hill debacle, there is growing resentment against a regime that strains relations between the sexes, holds men guilty until proven innocent, and encourages women to play the victim.

Yet, Young went on, "newly sensitized conservatives" were now wringing their hands over developments like the dismissal of the Paula Jones suit, and Jones's adviser, Susan Carpenter-McMillan, was lamenting that feminist leaders had "'ruined the issue of sexual harassment.' [But] as framed in this decade, the issue of sexual harassment is a farce that deserves to be ruined."

I hope Young is right about this "growing resentment." But if she thinks the soft feminist reaction to the Clinton sex scandals is a sign of it, I fear she will soon discover that the sisters can, and will, turn around again on a dime the next time a Republican or some other bad guy is foolish enough to imagine that the women's movement has become an equal-opportunity indulger.*

In moving now toward a conclusion, I arrive at the last of the five groups I have singled out for examination: the American people as seen through the polls.

One of the most intriguing of the questions raised by the Clinton sex scandals was why his job-approval ratings kept going up as the scandals multiplied. In spite of the forgiveness that had been accorded him by the electorate over Gennifer Flowers in 1992, everyone of every political stripe was sure that the latest bimbo eruptions would damage, and perhaps even destroy, Clinton's political standing with the American people. Consequently, when his numbers went up instead, there was much scratching of heads within the punditocracy.

Was it, after all, a matter of "the economy, stupid"? Was the prosperity the American people were enjoying on Clinton's watch the only thing they really cared about? Or was it that, contrary to what we had been led to believe by all the statistics demonstrating how religious Americans were, they had become more tolerant about sex, willing to live and let live? Were they now prepared to make a distinction between a public official's private life and his public performance?

If so, cheered the liberals, including those who hastened to express disapproval of or even disgust over Clinton's sexual habits, this was a healthy development, signifying greater civility and maturity. Like the feminists' reversal on sexual harassment, this new satisfaction with the American people, whom liberals had been maligning for years as bigoted and repressive, represented a big change. But there was also a commensurately obverse change among conservatives, who had all along been proclaiming that the American people were on their side of the great divide in the "culture wars," and especially on issues of "character" and sexual morality.

The most important of these conservatives was William J. Bennett. In extemporaneous remarks before the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC), Bennett gave vent to a concern that had not previously seemed warranted to him:

> Here's one thing conservatives need to be clear about. We have been on a Washington-bashing spree for a few years now, talking about the moral vacuum in Washington. Let us now, clearly and unambiguously, state the unstated fear: the moral decline in Washington is not only in Washington, it is outside the Beltway, too. . . . Those opinion polls are . . . from all over the country. . . . That is an erosion. That is moral decline.

Now I have rarely disagreed with Bennett on anything in recent years. I also believe he has been doing the Lord's work through the many books and articles and speeches, including this latest one to CPAC, in which he has stressed the crucial role played by virtue in the thinking of the founding fathers and in the continuing viability of a free society like our own. And I am with him to the last syllable in that part of his CPAC speech where he speculates that some people who claim not to be disturbed by Clinton's sexual escapades are only saying so because they are afraid of being "considered prigs, old-fashioned, unchic, uncool," and that this submission to bullying is in its own right a serious moral problem. I can even heighten Bennett's worries by referring to the evidence out there—which he himself does not mention—that, far from disapproving of Clinton, a fair number of men (by no means all members of the "decadent" elites) envy the President the chance and the power to indulge his sexual appetites, and that plenty of women (ditto) find him so attractive that they dream of becoming one of his "bimbos" themselves.

A gaggle of famous feminists, brought together for a colloquy by the *New York Observer*, even confessed to entertaining such fantasies themselves.

* When Paula Jones decided to appeal Judge Wright's decision, there was some talk that feminists, worried about the implication that men now had a license for "one free grope," would join in the appeal. But NOW's Patricia Ireland immediately quashed this talk by declaring that her organization had "decided not to work with the disreputable [right-wingers] advancing [Jones's] cause." So much for the prospect of any feminist reconsideration of the whole range of issues involved here.

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Patricia Marx, late of *Saturday Night Live*, cooed that Clinton was "cute and getting cuter all the time," and the novelist Erica Jong, clearly determined to prove that age cannot wither her original incarnation as an *enfant terrible*, trumped everyone else at the meeting by chiming in with: "Oh, imagine swallowing the presidential come."

I grant that such famous and highly-placed women are irrelevant to Bennett's fear that the country at large is now caught up in a moral decline. But in their own way, they strengthen the case he makes. It is, I also grant, a powerful case. Nevertheless, my own take on how and why the American people have responded to the Clinton sex scandals does not lead to the unambiguous conclusion that we are witnessing a "moral decline" in the country at large.

THERE ARE three considerations I wish to explore in this connection. First, I would say that Robert J. Samuelson of *Newsweek* is right in arguing that the prosperity-driven "optimism" of the American people is not the only factor by which Clinton has been shielded. There is also their "dislike of politics." Personally I prefer the word "indifference" to Samuelson's "dislike," but under whatever name, this attitude in my judgment deserves greater emphasis than the present American optimism. And as Samuelson himself recognizes in quoting James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth*, such indifference is a venerable American sentiment. After visiting this country from England in 1881, Bryce remarked:

> I never once heard American politics discussed except when I or some other European brought the subject on the carpet. . . . [The American] has been heavily pressed by his own business concerns during the day, and . . . when the hour of relaxation arrives, he gladly turns to [lighter] topics than the state of the nation.

Bryce's observation seems to me as true of the Americans of today as it was of their forebears over a century ago, and it helps explain why (except in periods of great crisis, like wars or depressions) they demand so little of their political leaders.

Here is where the second consideration arises. Another Englishman, Harold Macmillan—who was Prime Minister of his country during a time when many issues that had previously been thought to belong outside the realm of politics were being dragged into it—said that if people wanted a sense of purpose in life, they should go not to their political leaders but to their bishops. In the even more politicized America of the 1960's and 70's, those who tried following Macmillan's advice were sent by their bishops right back to the politicians. But in the America of the late 90's, people—and even bishops—have learned better than to look to politicians for moral guidance or as moral exemplars.

Where Clinton in particular is concerned, the general opinion of his supporters, and even of many of his opponents, has been that he is a charming and likable rogue. As such, he is not asked to provide moral leadership; he is only asked (as he himself likes saying) to do the "job" for which he was "hired."

To be sure, the historian Forrest McDonald is on the mark when he writes in *National Review* that the most important part of a President's "job" is the one at which Clinton has miserably failed: "the ritualistic, the ceremonial, and symbolic." McDonald also fears that in "flouting" this side of his responsibilities, Clinton may even have done lasting damage to the office of the presidency itself.

Worried though he is about this, however, McDonald also reminds us that the office has "been thoroughly discredited" several times before, only to bounce back again later. David Gergen in *U.S. News & World Report* similarly reminds us that "In the late 19th century, writers like Henry Adams thought there was only one way to look at a President, and that was down."*

But this too changed with the ascension of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the major crises—from depression to hot war to cold war—that endowed the presidency with greater power and prestige than it had ever enjoyed before. Now, in an (undoubtedly temporary) era marked by the absence of any comparable crises, the presidency would have been cut down to size no matter who was occupying the Oval Office. This is not to say that its present incumbent has made no contribution of his own to the process. He has, and it has been to deprive the presidency so completely of *gravitas* and weight that no one expects much more of it than routine administrative competence.

In any event, unlike Bennett and other conservatives who perceive in these diminished moral expectations a flaw in the American people, I am inclined to regard them as on balance a realistic and salutary drift away from the misplaced dependence on Clinton's most admired recent predecessors—

* To document Gergen's observation, I would cite the character modeled by Henry James on Adams who says, "Hang it, let us be vulgar and have some fun—let us invite the President." Of course this was not how Adams felt about the two Presidents who were his grandfather and great-grandfather.

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misplaced not only because they were not "bishops" but because in their personal lives, whether as husbands (Roosevelt and Kennedy) or fathers (again Roosevelt and also Reagan), they hardly deserved it much more, if at all, than Clinton himself.

This, then, is the second reason I disagree that the reaction of the American people to the Clinton sex scandals is a symptom of "moral erosion."

The third and final reason is that I think the American people are in a much more complicated moral condition than Bennett does. I am as great a believer in the polls as the next man, and no more than Bennett do I question the accuracy of the job-approval numbers they have yielded for Clinton in tandem with the latest series of bimbo eruptions. But neither do I regard the polls as the last word on this or any other development, and when we are trying to pin down something as elusive as the moral climate of the nation, they can be—as it seems to me they have been to Bennett—highly misleading. A better indicator, I believe, is such products of the popular culture as movies, television shows, and radio programs. Since they live or die by their appeal to huge audiences, we are entitled to infer that the successful ones are a good reflection of what many millions of people want to hear and are inclined to accept.

What then can we learn from these successful specimens of mass culture? I would contend that, on the one hand, they tell us that people are trying to hold on to the traditional moral standards and that they wish to be reassured about the continuing validity and viability of these standards. The huge sales of Bennett's own books about virtue can be placed into evidence here; and on a lower cultural level I would point to the rise of the aggressively traditional moralizer Dr. Laura Schlessinger, whose radio talk show—in another sign that we are experiencing a Brycean withdrawal of affect from politics—has just surpassed Rush Limbaugh in popularity and is now number one in its category.

Yet at the very same time that "Dr. Laura" is achieving such great popularity, her polar opposite, the raunchy and obscene Howard Stern, is coming up fast on the inside. Stern is also about to be launched on network television, which—in his own cheerful estimation—has sunk to the point where it can tolerate the likes of him. And indeed, the sexual content of mainstream television shows has become more and more explicit. Language is now routinely used on prime-time network television that would only yesterday have been banned; there is more nudity than would have been conceivable even in the very recent past; and scenes approaching soft-core porn have become commonplace. True, hard-core porn is not yet being broadcast on television, but it finds its way onto the TV screen through the VCR, into which millions of such video cassettes are inserted every year.

What are we to make of this bizarre dialectic? To me, the most plausible interpretation is that there are two audiences, or even two nations, out there—one traditionalist and one liberationist, and that the market is feeding each of them the fare it needs for subsistence. But as some of us learned from Hegel and more of us learned from Marx, where there is a dialectic, a synthesis will eventually emerge. And I think we see such a synthesis forming before our very eyes both in the movies and on television.

My favorite of the many examples I could choose from the movies is *An Officer and a Gentleman*, a film made some years back by Taylor Hackford. In its original unedited-for-television form (the movies still being very much freer in these respects than TV), it contained so much obscene language and graphically depicted casual sex that it could easily have qualified for boycotting by any of the groups on the Christian Right who go in for such futile and counterproductive gestures. But in this instance the boycotters would also have been mistaken in concentrating on all the dirty stuff, since it was being drafted into the service of a highly traditionalist story. That story told how the military—that most despised of all institutions in the eyes of the liberationist culture whose language the movie so skillfully plundered—can make a man out of a useless bum, and how love can cause a promiscuous girl to go straight. By the end, the former bum played by Richard Gere has become, precisely, an officer and a gentleman, and the factory girl (Debra Winger) is about to marry him and turn from the camp-follower tramp she was into what the audience has no doubt will be a model wife and mother. One might say that the movie was using the lingo of the liberationist culture to reaffirm the values of the traditionalist culture and to make them more palatable to a hip contemporary audience.

A more recent illustration of the same species of moral and cultural double-agentry, this one taken from television, is *Ally McBeal*, the great surprise hit of the past two seasons. A viewer attending only to the surface of this show will find enough "erosion" to prove Bennett's indictment beyond a reasonable doubt. The heroine, a young lawyer, is a liberated woman in the by-now old-fashioned sense of feeling free to sleep with any man who takes her fancy.

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And when she does (sometimes right in the eye of the camera, in one of those borderline soft-core scenes), she feels equally free to talk about it to her friends and associates. None of them ever expresses the slightest moral disapproval (and neither does her creator, David E. Kelley), though she often as not winds up feeling vaguely guilty and they usually caution her against getting hurt.

All this, again, on the one hand. But on the other hand, for all her glib talk about sex, Ally, who gave up the love of her life for the sake of her career, now desperately yearns for a husband and children ("I want to change the world," she says, "but I just want to get married first"). Along with everyone else on the show, she also disapproves of marital infidelity ("Some promises just have to be kept") and will undoubtedly settle down some day to become a faithful wife and embrace "family values" (but of course without being so square as to call them that). So successful is this show that young women all over the country reportedly gather together to watch it every week and then spend the rest of the evening discussing its implications.

Without, I hope, making too much heavy weather out of what I fully acknowledge are only ephemeral entertainments and not enduring works of art, I submit that a series like *Ally McBeal*, together with a film like *An Officer and a Gentleman*, provide us with a revealing clue to the complexities of the moral condition of the nation that elude the polls which have been troubling the sleep of William Bennett. Still another eminent British personage, Huw Wheldon, used to tell the more culturally radical producers on his staff when he ran the television service of the BBC that if they were to turn out successful dramatic shows, they needed to appreciate that "the deep mores of a people change very slowly." This was what Taylor Hackford probably sensed in directing *An Officer and a Gentleman*, and I would speculate that the same intuition on the part of David Kelley is what has made his show such a big hit.

In a brilliant essay in a recent issue of the *Public Interest*, the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb offers a comprehensive, complex, and subtle account of the "ethics gap" between the two nations of contemporary America, and then ends by suggesting that they may already be reaching a limited accommodation that will enable them to live together "with some degree of tension and dissension but without civil strife or anarchy." I agree that this is happening, though the terms of the peace treaty I see being negotiated are perhaps a little less weighted on the side of the religious party and its secular sympathizers, and a little more weighted on the *Ally McBeal* side, than the one Himmelfarb seems to envisage.

PERHAPS, THEN, in reacting to the Clinton sex scandals, the various groups I have singled out have done more than spread confusion about feminism and about the law of sexual harassment and about the principles of conservatism. Perhaps they have also blinded us to the possibility that something new may be emerging from the culture wars that will make up for and in some sense redeem the indignities brought upon the nation by the squalor of this President's gross and reckless behavior.

If so, and if we are really lucky, this hopeful new development will also include a more widespread and more lasting decline in the power and the influence of the feminist movement, which, in responding as it has to "sexgate," now stands nakedly exposed, at least for the moment, as just another wing of the Democratic party. Believing as I do that this movement has done great harm to the relations between the sexes, I can only hope that the adulterous liaison into which it has entered with Clinton will end by bringing lasting discredit upon its ideas about those relations. And I hope almost as fervently that the conservatives who have moved into the breach for political reasons of their own will now have second thoughts about coming to the rescue of the feminist concept of sexual harassment.

For this concept, and the attitudes both on which it is based and which have flowed from it—attitudes as callow as they are vicious—have gone beyond befouling and distorting the relations between the sexes. They have also fattened the already swollen power of the legal system over our lives by surrendering to its jurisdiction yet another huge domain of experience, and one much too delicate for lawyers, judges, and juries to handle with the finesse and delicacy it requires and deserves.

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What to Do About Saddam Hussein

Joshua Muravchik

FOR MOST of the past fall and winter, the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein held both the United Nations and the United States at bay, finally agreeing to end the latest confrontation over his weapons of mass destruction only when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan traveled to Baghdad and accepted cumbersome new procedures for UN inspections. Although the agreement struck by Annan violated the "red lines" the United States had insisted on, President Clinton quickly set aside his military threats against the Iraqi tyrant and embraced it.

Much of the American public, and even many opponents of the administration, shared Clinton's palpable sense of relief. As Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of Defense in the Bush administration, put it: "If the choice is between a bad agreement . . . and a bad war . . . I think we at least got the better of the two bad alternatives."

America may well have avoided a bad war. But it also lost ground in its campaign to meet the threat posed by Iraq's arsenal. To hold together what support it can, Washington has acquiesced in a new Security Council resolution vastly increasing the amount of oil Iraq may export and the quantities of food and other goods it may import. Although this commerce is supposed to be monitored, transactions of such magnitude will inevitably leave scope for militarily useful contraband. In addition, Saddam Hussein's rehabilitation from the status of international pariah was advanced by the Secretary General's visit to Baghdad, and Annan's endorsement of his criticisms of UN inspectors will strengthen Iraq's hand in future disputes. Finally, in Europe and the Arab world, public reaction to this entire episode focused much less on Iraqi miscreancy than on alleged American adamancy and belligerency.

As for the deal itself, while Hussein yielded to the demand for inspection of the 1,000-plus buildings that make up his so-called "presidential sites," the Iraqis had ample time to remove whatever was hidden in them, as UN inspectors later confirmed they had done. More importantly, if future inspections come near to uncovering something Hussein deems vital, he can rest assured that Washington, having tiptoed to the brink of military action and then backed away, will be in a much weaker position to muster international or domestic support for new threats. In the meantime, pressure mounts for lifting sanctions on Iraq even though the regime's biological-weapons program remains, in the words of Richard Butler, chairman of the UN inspection commission, a "black hole."

In short, while administration spokesmen insist that Saddam Hussein is still "in his box," it is America itself that is increasingly boxed in. Within a few years or perhaps even sooner, Hussein is like-

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ly to free himself from the international constraints under which he now chafes. With the country still firmly in his grip, he will then command both a still-formidable conventional military force and the capacity to deploy weapons of mass destruction. Even should such arms be discovered and destroyed, Iraq's engineers and scientists have acquired the knowledge to reconstruct biological weapons within weeks, chemical weapons within months, and nuclear weapons within a year or two. The entire situation has been well-summed-up by the former deputy chief of the UN weapons inspectors, David Kay: "Iraq is a country now able to produce weapons of mass destruction . . . . The only way to get rid of [them] is regime change."

REGIME CHANGE: this has, indeed, been at least one professed goal of American policy ever since Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. But with the exception of Operation Desert Storm, precious little has been done to make it happen. And even Operation Desert Storm, spectacular though it was, constituted but a partial exception. At the conclusion of that campaign, the U.S. commander, General Norman Schwarzkopf, boasted that "we were 150 miles away from Baghdad, and there was nobody between us and Baghdad." Why, then, did we not go there, and finish off the despot whom President George Bush had repeatedly likened to Hitler?

The explanation given at the time was that civilian and military leaders alike were loath to risk the higher casualties that might have come from exposing U.S. forces to urban battles. They were also averse—despite President Bush's boast that we had "kicked the Vietnam syndrome"—to any situation that held the risk of becoming a "quagmire." And America was likewise inhibited by the fact that the war was being conducted under a limited mandate from the UN—a mandate sought by President Bush largely in order to win over the U.S. Congress, where, at least among the Democrats, post-Vietnam distrust of military action was still in full flower.

The failure to roll on to Baghdad was not the only American decision that helped Saddam Hussein hang on to power. We also failed to cripple thoroughly the elite Republican Guard on which he was dependent. Such action had indeed been part of the battle plan, but it became compromised in Washington's unseemly haste to end the fighting. On the fourth day of ground combat, America's civilian leaders asked military commanders how soon it could be halted. Schwarzkopf told Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that in one more day he could complete the destruction of the military equipment the Republican Guard had brought to the battle area. When Powell reported back, President Bush and his top aides, worried that America's one-sided victory was making it look like a bully, said, in effect, if the war can be brought to an end tomorrow, why not today? And so it was decided. As a result, most of the leadership and the equipment of the Republican Guard, including half its tanks, got away.

Next, when a popular revolt erupted among returning Iraqi soldiers, America failed again to act on its wish to be rid of Saddam, standing aside while the Republican Guard units that had slipped from our grasp crushed the rebels. Although Bush had called on Iraqis to oust Saddam Hussein, evidently he was not counting on an actual grass-roots rebellion, and did not welcome it.

IN THIS wariness, Bush and his team were reflecting their own deeply ingrained penchant for "realism" in foreign policy—the very same mentality that, in the 1980's, had led America to *court* Iraq as a geopolitical makeweight against Iran, and thus set the stage for the confrontation to come. In those years, turning its eyes from Hussein's well-documented barbarities, including the gassing of his own Kurdish citizens, Washington had secretly assisted Iraq's military efforts against Iran. Even when Saddam Hussein began to threaten Kuwait in 1990, America's response was notably tepid, voiced, as Bush put it, in "a spirit of friendship." Is it any wonder the Iraqi dictator thought Washington would allow him to swallow Kuwait as well?

The same "realist" world view was in evidence at war's end in the response to the grass-roots Iraqi rebellion, which caught Washington by surprise. It seems that during the courtship years of the 80's, a little-known policy had been enacted forbidding contact between U.S. officials and the already extant Iraqi opposition. Amazingly, this ban was kept in place even after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and all the way through Operation Desert Storm. Thus, when Iraqi opposition leaders endeavored to inform the U.S. government of the impending revolt, executive-branch officials refused to see them.

But why did we decline to take even minimal steps to assist the insurgents once the revolt started? Exploiting a loophole in the ceasefire agreements, Baghdad's helicopter gunships were wreaking devastation on the rebels. Schwarzkopf could have grounded these helicopters, but, he claimed later, "I really do not think it would have made any difference at all." In fact, however, the decision not

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to ground the helicopters was political, not military. As the *New York Times* reported, Bush had "decided to let President Saddam Hussein put down rebellions in his country without American intervention rather than risk the splintering of Iraq." Colin Powell was even blunter: in consigning the rebels to Saddam Hussein's mercy, "our practical intention was to leave Baghdad enough power to survive as a threat to . . . Iran." In either case, getting rid of Saddam Hussein had been relegated to a lower priority.

Administration officials later came up with yet another rationale for withholding support from the rebels: by causing the Iraqi military to close ranks around Saddam, the insurgents, it was said, were actually posing an obstacle to the coup for which the administration had been hoping all along. This reasoning was as specious as it was after-the-fact. In many other instances around the globe—Algeria in the 1990's, El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980's, Cambodia and Vietnam in the 1960's and 1970's—the pressure of a popular rebellion has not hindered but has rather impelled military factions to overthrow local rulers. The truth is the other way around: once America failed to come to the support of the rebels, it should have surprised no one that the Iraqi generals refrained in turn from any attempt to oust Saddam Hussein.

IN ANY event, when the postwar coup failed to materialize, Bush did order the CIA to inaugurate a covert-action plan, and the agency duly came up with two main enterprises: it hired a Washington public-relations firm to carry out a worldwide publicity campaign against Saddam, and it assisted in the formation of an umbrella group linking various Iraqi Kurdish and Shiite groups as well as other opposition elements. This united front was organized by Ahmad Chalabi, a banker and scion of a prominent Baghdad family.

The Iraqi National Congress (INC), to use the front's English name, was founded at a conference in Vienna in June 1992, and put itself more firmly on the map a few months later by convening 400 opposition representatives in the northern Iraqi city of Salah ad-Din, which lay under Western protection. Over the next two years, the INC established a network that carried out various political, intelligence, and propaganda activities designed to create an image of northern Iraq as a "liberated" region. But the INC was apparently not viewed in Washington as anything more than a potential irritant to Baghdad, and the lion's share of CIA funds went to the public-relations firm.

In the meantime, Bill Clinton had been elected President of the United States, and political change in Iraq, never high on America's agenda, fell even lower. The difference was that whereas, in the previous administration, inaction had been rationalized on grounds of "realism," now it would be rationalized by appeals to multilateralism, and buttressed by a deep-seated unease about the use of military force.

A week before his inauguration in January 1993, the President-elect extended an olive branch to Hussein, distancing himself from the Bush position that normal relations with Iraq would be impossible as long as Saddam remained in power, and thereby signaling that "regime change" might no longer be a goal of American policy. "If he wants a different relationship with the United States and the United Nations," Clinton said, "all he has to do is change his behavior." In keeping with this posture, the administration reduced (though it did not eliminate) funding for covert activities.

But Clinton's overtures went unrewarded. Just three months into the new administration, evidence emerged that Iraqi intelligence—that is, Saddam—had ordered an attempt on the life of former President Bush as he was on tour in newly liberated Kuwait. First the CIA and then the FBI were called upon to study the allegation—both came to the conclusion that it was substantiated—and then the administration took its time debating what to do about it. Although Attorney General Janet Reno argued for a strictly legal approach, the President, reportedly with great reluctance, finally resolved on a punitive strike. The strike consisted of a few cruise missiles fired into a headquarters building of Iraqi intelligence—at night, so as to minimize casualties. ("That way, the only ones killed would be the cleaning ladies," quipped former Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle.)

This set the tone for all the administration's subsequent dealings with Iraq. Thus, a year later, when Saddam Hussein sent his Republican Guard south and put them in a position once again to attack Kuwait, the U.S. rushed forces to the area and compelled Iraq to back off—but conspicuously failed to exact punishment. Then, in late 1994 and early 1995, the INC, under Chalabi and the Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani, set out to seize one or both of the major northern cities of Mosul and Irkuk; administration officials sent a message urging them to desist, warning that if they proceeded, "you are on your own."

In the immediate aftermath of this demonstration of waning American interest in the INC, Massoud Barzani, a Kurdish rival to Jalal Talabani, decided to throw in his lot with Saddam Hussein, secretly invit-

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ing the dictator to send his army back into the UN-declared "safe haven" in northern Iraq and wrest the town of Irbil from Talabani. For eleven days in August 1996, the Republican Guard massed troops and tanks outside Irbil. According to Talabani and Chalabi, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau assured them there would be "serious consequences" for Iraq in the event of an attack; indeed, says a former U.S. intelligence analyst, "most Iraqis believed that northern Iraq was under the protection of the U.S. military, and they were surprised when the U.S. didn't come to the opposition's rescue."

But it did not. When the assault was finally launched, Republican Guard forces stormed into Irbil, routing Talabani as well as the extensive INC network, their CIA handlers, and members of another American-backed resistance group known as the Iraqi National Accord. Scores, possibly hundreds, were seized by the government forces and met a grisly end. Three days passed before Washington finally launched cruise missiles—against idle Iraqi anti-aircraft batteries 500 miles away—and announced a widening of the no-fly zone *in the south*.

With the "safe haven" in the north nullified, and the INC devastated, an emboldened Saddam decided to test further the international constraints imposed on him. Early in 1997, in artful defiance of the no-fly zone, Iraq used helicopters to ferry pilgrims to Mecca. In June, Iraq heightened its obstruction of UN weapons investigators by interfering with their flights, and deployed anti-aircraft batteries in a way threatening to American U-2 spy planes. The obstruction intensified still further in September, prompting the U.S. and Britain to bring to the Security Council a motion threatening an eventual ban on international travel by Iraqi officials. When Russia, China, France, Egypt, and Kenya all abstained, Saddam apparently felt strong enough to expel American inspectors, precipitating this past winter's confrontation and bringing us to our current pass.

IS THERE any way out of the "box"? Michael O'Hanlon, of the Brookings Institution, suggests that "we can probably contain [Saddam Hussein] just as we contained the Soviets for half a century." In fact, some such rationale seems to be behind the Clinton administration's policy toward Iraq. The analogy, however, is weak.

The Soviet Union was an evil empire, but, despite the tens of millions of lives it destroyed, it was also a relatively cautious one. By contrast, Iraq under this regime has been the globe's most reckless power. Indeed, the 1990 invasion of Kuwait was the most bold-faced act of aggression the world has seen since Iraq invaded Iran in 1980. In both cases, according to Iraq expert Amatzia Baram, the decision was taken by Saddam Hussein alone, "without any real consultation," and was based in large measure on "motives of national and personal honor." Similarly, out of nothing but vengefulness, Saddam commanded his troops to torch Kuwait's oil wells as they fled the country, and ordered the assassination attempt on George Bush.

Saddam is also unlike Soviet rulers in his cavalier attitude to weapons of mass destruction. He boasted in 1990 that he would "burn half of Israel" with chemicals, and reportedly promised Yasir Arafat to liberate Jerusalem with missiles. Were these boasts idle? He had already used chemical weapons against his own Kurdish population in the 1970's and against Iran in the 1980's, and he started to use them again against Iraqi Shiites in 1991.

As for the United States, we have little capacity for dealing with the biological weapons Saddam Hussein has devoted so much effort to accumulating. They are perfectly suited to delivery by a terrorist—a small package of anthrax released in the subway system of an American city could kill vast numbers—and, because the spores are not detectable by the senses and do not take effect instantaneously, a perpetrator can be out of the country before the attack is discovered. In the event of such an attack, moreover, would the U.S. retaliate? In the attempt on Bush's life, eleven of the sixteen men caught were Iraqis, and the bombs they were caught with bore an Iraqi signature; even so, we demanded a lengthy FBI investigation before deciding to retaliate, weakly. How could we prove the source of an anthrax attack? What would Janet Reno say?

Nor is such an attack "deterrable" as we deterred Soviet nuclear power. We certainly are not going to threaten to retaliate in kind—that is, with biological weapons of our own. Might we threaten instead to respond with nuclear weapons? Against which targets? Would such a threat be credible?

Even to raise such questions is to suggest how glib it is to think that we can easily "contain" Saddam, and the actual record of the Clinton administration hardly inspires a greater degree of confidence. More importantly, containment by itself, let us remember, was not responsible for the Soviet Union's demise. By the late 1970's, countries were falling to Communism at a faster rate than ever before. Ronald Reagan succeeded in reversing this momentum only by adopting a policy of "containment-plus," the linchpin of which was the decision to aid anti-Communist insurgencies. The groups in question were fractious, inexperienced, and some-

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times unsavory or corrupt, and few Americans believed they stood any chance of winning. But they helped turn the tide of the cold war.

The only way out of the Iraqi "box" is the way suggested by David Kay: the removal of Saddam from power. And the model that should guide our policy is "containment-plus." Such a policy might include many elements, but the key would be support for efforts by the Iraqi opposition to oust Saddam, and the place to begin would be with the Iraqi National Congress.

Kanan Makiya, the Iraqi author of the best-seller *Republic of Fear* (published under the pseudonym Samar al-Khalil), has called the INC "the single most promising development in Iraqi politics in many decades." Most observers agree that, despite the lack of military or any other kind of help, the INC did a creditable job in its political and propaganda efforts in 1993-95, and that even its March 1995 military offensive was a limited success. Although that offensive hardly constituted a real threat to Saddam's regime, it unsettled him enough to sack both his northern military commander and his defense minister.

Some U.S. officials assert that the INC's military prospects are nil, but that is what was said of the Nicaraguan *contras* and the Afghan *mujahedeen*, both of whom in the end were successful. The same goes for the INC's fractiousness, again no greater than that of the *contras* or the *mujahedeen*. Although in the early 1990's the INC failed to develop real military clout, the fact is, as Paul Wolfowitz has pointed out, that the U.S. did not give it a single rifle.

This should be reversed. America could supply the opposition with weapons, including anti-tank and anti-helicopter missiles; these, together with rigorous enforcement of the no-fly zone, would neutralize many of the advantages enjoyed by the Iraqi army. We could also supply military training. In former Yugoslavia, the Serbs looked invincible just a few years ago, but once Croatian forces received American training they were able to liberate their territory almost overnight.

The INC's leader, Admad Chalabi, is a hard-driving man who gets on the nerves of some U.S. officials and reportedly of some Arab leaders as well. Nonetheless, as one closely involved official has remarked, he is "the only one of the Iraqi opposition who has ever shown an ability to organize anything." Chalabi professes democracy, and by all accounts he has labored tirelessly to accommodate the diverse factions in his umbrella organization. Whereas past Iraqi oppositionists have tended to orient themselves ideologically toward Syria or Iran, Chalabi faces West.

One wonders, indeed, whether Chalabi's democratic professions might not weigh *against* him in the eyes of U.S. officials. After all, the "authentic" way to reach power in that region of the world has been the palace coup, not popular insurgency. But, even aside from the fact that such coups have been rare in recent decades, why should we assume that amid all the political change taking place today, the Arabs alone must remain frozen in a culture of medieval violence and authoritarianism? Those Iraqis who say they want to fight for democracy may not, in the end, prove to be true democrats, but there can be no real test of that proposition unless and until they come to power.

This is not to say that our efforts need be limited to the INC. If there are other opposition groups, we could support them, too, or work to reconcile factions. We could even encourage a coup—though there might be little gain in replacing Saddam with other members of his clique, all of whom have blood on their hands; and why should we help perpetuate the Baathist ideology, which combines radical Arab nationalism, socialism, and tyranny, and has produced not only Saddam's Iraq but Assad's scarcely less repellent regime in Syria?

Helping the opposition need not be expensive, but we should be prepared to contribute what is necessary. At the height of our support for the Nicaraguan *contras*, we spent $100 million a year. Even though Iraq is nearly five times more populous than Nicaragua and far more is at stake there, we have never given the INC more than a few million a year. Nor should our support be covert, except in certain operational details. On the contrary, we ought to be loud and public in our efforts, using the airwaves as we did with Radio Liberty against the USSR.

We will be asked by what right we thus make bold to intervene in Iraq's internal affairs. Our answer should be that we derive this right from Saddam Hussein's repeated violations of the law of nations: his acts of international aggression; his atrocities against the Iraqi Kurds and Shiites; and his stubborn refusal to comply with Security Council resolutions that required divestiture of his weapons of mass destruction seven years ago. On these very same grounds, we ought to be prepared to respond with overwhelming force if Saddam challenges us militarily. But even if he does not, we must put an end to his evil and dangerous regime. There are Iraqis who want to do it, and it is time we got serious about helping them.

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Auschwitz and the Professors

Gabriel Schoenfeld

HARVARD'S HOLOCAUST chair has been in the news again.

It was bad enough that, as of this past winter, the university had kept the slot unfilled for more than three years, prompting the New York financier Kenneth Lipper, who had underwritten the professorship, to shift much of his $3-million grant elsewhere. "It breaks [Lipper's] heart what's happening at Harvard," attested Michael Berenbaum, the former director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and now the head of Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. But still worse was to come in the spring. Though the committee at Harvard had interviewed an all-star roster of historians, its members could not agree on who was most suitable to hold the endowed chair. And so, the university announced, the search was indefinitely suspended.

In the volley of criticism that followed this announcement, one especially fierce salvo came from Debórah Dwork, who directs the Center for Holocaust Studies at Clark University in nearby Worcester, Massachusetts. "I think it is appalling that Harvard is not endorsing this field of study," she said.

Is it? Harvard's lapse brings to the fore a number of genuinely difficult questions that have been, or should have been, on the minds of those spearheading the expansion of "Holocaust studies" in American universities. Nearly two decades ago, the critic Robert Alter cautioned in these pages against the distortions that would inevitably ensue as the Holocaust became "academicized" ("Deformations of the Holocaust," February 1981). A "topic or event, however momentous," Alter warned, "is not an academic discipline," and to turn it into one was inevitably to skew perspectives. In particular, Alter was worried that presenting the fathomless evil of the Holocaust in the detached, dispassionate environment of a university lecture hall would have, in his words, the "unhappy effect of naturalizing the horror."

In the years since Alter's article appeared, Holocaust studies have become an established feature of the academic landscape, complete with endowed professorships, introductory and advanced courses, "interdisciplinary projects," undergraduate "concentrations," and the like. In a relatively brief period of time, the number of academic "resource centers," i.e., specialized libraries devoted to the Holocaust, has mushroomed from a handful to more than a hundred. And if in 1981 there were 93 courses being offered on the subject in American and Canadian institutions of higher learning, ten years later that figure had nearly doubled, and has continued to grow throughout the 90's. Since it was founded in 1993, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington has created its own university-style Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, which offers 25 annual training fellowships, and it plans to organize an

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international consortium of universities with Holocaust chairs.

The canvas, then, is large and becoming larger. It is also quite various, in terms both of areas of specialization and of the quality of work being done. But within the variety a number of disquieting features remain readily discernible, including, in the first place, the sense-deadening phenomenon of "naturalization" that Alter cautioned against. Thanks to a number of other developments in our academic culture, however, things have also gotten considerably worse than he could have foretold.

PERHAPS MOST striking to any outside observer is the way in which courses on the Nazi slaughter of Europe's Jews—"Holocaust 101," in Elie Wiesel's alarmed and alarming phrase—are now routinely exploited as commercial bragging points in the self-promotion of American institutions of higher learning. Clark University is a case in point. Harvard may be lagging in the great Holocaust sweepstakes, but Clark, according to the handsome publicity materials it puts out about itself, is a trailblazer. Clark offers "a comprehensive undergraduate education in Holocaust and genocide studies"; in fact, "it is the only college or university in all of the Americas and Europe to provide such a rich education in this field." Clark also "boasts the first Ph.D. program in Holocaust history"; it prides itself on having not merely one Holocaust chair but two, and it plans soon to have four. Of the chairholders, one is the aforementioned Debórah Dwork, a pioneer in women's studies who, we are told, also serves as an adviser to the government of Poland on "tourism" and "ecology" at "the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration-camp site."

Though Clark's program is, as its publicity crows, among the most advanced in the world, it is hardly the most with-it. Undergraduates at Swarthmore can avail themselves of a "multidisciplinary" Holocaust course that also promises to be "truly multicultural." Dickinson State University in North Dakota vies for interscholastic honors with "The Holocaust in Historical Context: An Internet Extension Course." The University of Nevada at Reno offers students a nineteen-credit minor in Holocaust, Genocide, and Peace Studies that includes a hands-on "internship" providing "structured and supervised experience combining professional opportunities with reflective learning." At the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, cadets can engage in "role-playing exercises" in a Holocaust course that the Academy rates first among its eighteen history-department offerings "in regard to knowledge, thinking, and enjoyment for all graded work."

Of course, tastelessness of one kind or another is not exactly unknown on today's campuses. Nor does a university's self-presentation, however vulgar, necessarily tell us anything definitive about the teaching that takes place in its classrooms, or the research done by its professors. But the news on that front is, if anything, bleaker still.

"I warn you against the creation of 'Holocaustology' and the careerism of 'Holocaustologians,'" implored the Israeli scholar Yehuda Bauer at a conference in 1977. What he had in mind was the very process of "naturalizing the horror" that Robert Alter pointed to. Today, not only are academic careers built on the Holocaust, but research into it has also been thoroughly academicized. The very language in which the murder of six million Jews is discussed has become in no way distinguishable from the language of agricultural macroeconomics or the sociology of chimpanzees—which is to say that even at its best, it is often full of the most egregious professional jargon.

Consider, among practitioners of Holocaustology, the case of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, now an assistant professor at Harvard and one of the contenders for the university's ill-starred chair. Whatever the merits or demerits of its thesis, Goldhagen's 1996 best-seller, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, is suffused with the stultifying terminology of contemporary social science, its frequently harrowing descriptions of murder, torture, and starvation resting in a larger framework of "explanatory variables" and "analyses of the micro, meso, and macro levels," illustrated by unintelligible charts showing "a classificatory scheme that specifies four types of actions . . . mapped in two dimensions." Worse, throughout his book Goldhagen gives flesh to the "careerism" Bauer complained of by adopting a dismayingly sneering tone toward his fellow researchers, particularly those whose scholarly labors have obligingly paved the way for his own.

Or consider *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (1994), by Steven T. Katz, a professor of Jewish history at Cornell. The wholly admirable aim of this book is to show that the Holocaust was a unique event in human history—a proposition that Katz proceeds to test by a comprehensive and enormously erudite look at other instances of "mass death." But how, one must ask, is our understanding of this difficult subject, let alone our appreciation of its soul-shaking moral gravity, advanced by quasi-mathematical lectures on "the distinction between G (the presence of genocidal intent) in event

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E and ~G (the absence of genocidal intent) in event E_1—and again in every other event E_2 to E_n . . .”? Or by quasi-philosophical disquisitions informing us that “the manichean biologism of the Hitlerian cosmology is neither fluid nor primarily transcendental, though it does premise its empirical behavior on putative ontic truths, racial struggle being the immanent locus of adversarial transempirical actualities”?

AGAIN ONE should qualify: pretentiousness and obscurantism are not, in the final analysis, the worst of sins. Whatever their faults, both Katz and Goldhagen are serious scholars, committed to understanding and memorializing the tragedy of the European Jews in all its uniqueness and specificity. Unfortunately, however, this last cannot be said with confidence about many of their colleagues.

Here we come upon a somewhat different form of “naturalizing,” one that wrestles the Holocaust into the Procrustean bed not so much of academic cant, or of academic careerism, as of academic fashion. One such fashion these days goes by the name of “victim studies,” and it is distressing to report how quickly those running Holocaust “centers” have rushed to subsume the Holocaust under its intrinsically degrading rubric. As Alvin H. Rosenfeld has remarked, the murder of the European Jews is now reflexively linked in American liberal discourse with every major or minor infraction one can think of: “human-rights abuses, social inequalities suffered by racial and ethnic minorities and women, environmental disasters, AIDS, and a whole host of other things.”* The academic version of this leveling process can be seen at the Clark center, both in the kinds of courses offered under the tellingly inclusive title, “Holocaust and Genocide Studies,” and in Dwork’s earnest explanation that her objective is to “ensure that the Holocaust is taught *in the broader context* of genocide” (emphasis added).

But if that is the objective, one cannot help asking, why have a Holocaust center at all? Why not simply establish a place where Jews, Armenians, Cambodians, American Indians, AIDS sufferers, battered women, and other real or putative victims can be put under the scholarly magnifying glass all at once? (For one Holocaust scholar, the ecological impact of “thousands of pounds of human ash dumped into lakes and rivers” is no less urgent a subject than the Holocaust itself, and its study would serve usefully to “decenter narrowly anthropocentric views of human destruction.”) Creating a laboratory of holocausts, in fact, would seem to be the logic now in operation at Yale University’s newly minted and grandiosely titled Genocide Studies program.† At Yale, the destruction of the Jews promises to be fully naturalized indeed, reduced to one, and not necessarily the most compelling one, of many rich and revealing “case studies” that will enjoy the benefit of the university’s “comparative and multidisciplinary approaches.”

BETWEEN THE Scylla of an academicized “Holocaustology” and the Charybdis of a universalized victimology, there would seem nowhere to go but down. And down we must go. For the worst excesses of all on today’s campuses are being committed not by either of those trends *per se* but by the voguish hybrid known as gender studies—an academic approach that, as Lenore J. Weitzman and Dalia Ofer characterize it in their new book, *Women in the Holocaust*,** “represents cutting-edge scholarship in an emerging field.”

Like women’s studies, from which it emerged and from which it is virtually indistinguishable, gender studies aims to redress the alleged neglect of women (plus various sexual minorities including homosexuals and the “transgendered”) in scholarly disciplines across the alphabet from astronomy to history to zoology. It was only a matter of time before its zealous and accusatory gaze fell upon the study of the Holocaust, and now it has done so with a vengeance. Mainstream scholarship on the Nazi genocide, we are being told on every side, is not so much mainstream as “malestream.” As such, it is guilty, in the words of Joan Ringelheim, director of education at the Holocaust Memorial Museum, of consistently minimizing or ignoring “issues of sexual vulnerability and assaults against women” while at the same time subtly working to perpetuate misogynist stereotypes and patriarchal institutions—of which Nazism is an extreme but hardly the only example.

“Women’s voices,” says Mary D. Lagerway, a professor at Western Michigan University, “remain primarily marginal to Holocaust canon” [*sic*]. To redress this supposed imbalance, feminist scholars have been avidly cataloging instances of “gender-differentiated behavior” under conditions of Nazi persecution, an enterprise that entails studying all the various and unique ways Jewish women experienced the ghettos and the camps. In itself, such an undertaking is hardly without merit. Even in the

* “The Americanization of the Holocaust,” COMMENTARY, June 1995.

† Yale’s center is headed by none other than Ben Kiernan, a one-time supporter of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, and thereon hangs another tale. See Peter H. Rodman’s “Grantsmanship & the Killing Fields,” COMMENTARY, March 1996 .

** Yale, 402 pp., $30.00.

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midst of the Nazi genocide itself, Emmanuel Ringelblum, the chronicler of the Warsaw ghetto and the compiler of an extraordinary underground archive, commissioned a study devoted to this very question. But it is one thing to carry out such work in the name of honest understanding, and quite another to do so in the name of a naked ideological "agenda."

That feminist scholarship on the Holocaust is intended explicitly to serve the purposes of consciousness-raising—i.e., propaganda—is, as it happens, something its practitioners proudly admit, just as they are proud of their use of the Holocaust as a means of validating feminist theory itself. Unfortunately, in order to find these statements of intent one has to be willing to subject oneself to their prose—the general execrableness of which, let it be said, easily surpasses that of their male colleagues, while adding its own special notes of querulousness and righteous self-regard.

In books like *Women in the Holocaust*, *Different Voices: Women in the Holocaust* (1993), and *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (1993), or in academic journals like the *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* or *Contemporary Jewry*, one can, for example, come across R. Ruth Linden of Stanford proclaiming that "[s]ituated knowledge of the Holocaust requires the willingness to tolerate a condition of material-semiotic vertigo"; or Debra Renee Kaufman of Northeastern worrying aloud that to "use this cataclysmic event to potentially further our own careers seems unscrupulous, if not disrespectful," before going on to commit that very act of unscrupulous disrespect in "The Holocaust and Sociological Inquiry: A Feminist Analysis"; or the aforementioned Joan Ringelheim explaining that in general "women and minorities, the working class and the poor, prior to and after the Holocaust, have often lived in conditions similar in kind (although not always in degree) to those in the Holocaust"; or Myrna Goldenberg of Montgomery College and Johns Hopkins joyfully announcing, after days and weeks spent coding Holocaust memoirs for mentions of sexual differences, her discovery of "feminist values" in the barracks of Auschwitz.

A 1983 conference at Stern College on "Women Surviving the Holocaust" illustrates the lengths to which feminist scholars will go in pursuit of their propagandistic aims. The conference consisted in part of a series of "workshops" in which "facilitators"—primarily Holocaust professionals—posed questions to "resource persons"—primarily Holocaust survivors—about life in the camps. Depending on where the questions were leading, they could be regarded as either neutral or tendentious. Had, for example, the "resource person" been raped by guards? Had she menstruated or experienced menopause? Had she engaged in lesbian relationships? Did women, in general, have a harder time than men?

But where the questions were leading soon became evident. The purpose of this exercise, as it was put frankly at the Stern College conference, was "to enable survivors to respond to their experiences with increasing feminist consciousness." And so, when one "resource person"—a survivor of Maidanek—made the mistake of declaring that the women who perished in the camps would not have "enjoy[ed] us going over their sexual record," and then referred to lesbianism as an "aberration," she was roundly criticized by a "facilitator" and induced to apologize.

This is hardly the only instance of feminist re-education recorded in the literature. As Weitzman and Ofer inform us, many Holocaust survivors persist in believing "that being a woman was only rarely meaningful in their war experience." But that is presumably before they have been counseled, nudged, prodded, and rebuked; then, it appears, these same survivors begin to be pleasantly surprised "by the new insights they [have] gained" about the importance of "gender" in the concentration camps.

WHAT CAN be the object of such exercises, if not to sever Jewish women, in their own minds, from their families as well as from the larger Jewish community? So far as Myrna Goldenberg is concerned, the "values" that were miraculously to be found in the camps—"connectedness, nurturance, and caregiving"—are not human values, not Jewish values, but "feminist" ones, presumably as unknown to Jewish men in Hitler's Europe as to men throughout history. Even the fragmentary nature of the stories women survivors have told about the Holocaust can be forced into a point for the cause, suggesting (to R. Ruth Linden) an exemplary eschewal of "male" forms of history-writing in favor of "nonobjectivist, anti-positivist, feminist versions of objectivity."

In the pages of Weitzman and Ofer's anthology, only the Israeli journalist Ruth Bondy, a survivor of Theresienstadt, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Bergen-Belsen, objects to these relentlessly divisive methods. "Zyklon B did not differentiate between men and women," Bondy writes, in a memoir that she contributed to this volume "with grave reservations"; "the same death swept them all away." The spare, direct language of her narrative of Theresienstadt and

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Birkenau stands as an implicit riposte to those who, while paying lip-service to the inescapable truth that simply to be Jewish was to be marked for death, proceed systematically to obscure that truth by painting the Nazis less as anti-Semites than as "sexists," and who ludicrously characterize some of these anti-Semites' most unspeakable atrocities as "sexual harassment."

In their zeal to target the male sex, some feminist scholars have not even stopped with the Nazis. Thus, Joan Ringelheim has gone so far as to draw a connection between Nazi "sexism" and the, to her, age-old "exploitation" of Jewish women by . . . Jewish men. In this very link, indeed, Ringelheim has located a key to the puzzle of why "malestream" scholarship has allegedly erased the history of women in the Holocaust. After all, she writes, many people today simply find it "too difficult to contemplate the extent to which . . . the sexism of Nazi ideology and the sexism of the Jewish community met in a tragic and involuntary alliance."

ON THAT defamatory note we may be tempted to take our leave of the feminist Holocaustologians. And indeed, were they just a narrow cult living somewhere on a commune and insisting on a macabre sisterhood with the dead Jewish women of Europe, they could be safely ignored. Alas, however, just as Weitzman and Ofer assert, they represent "cutting-edge scholarship in an emerging field," issuing a steady dribble of articles and books and increasingly assuming important positions in Holocaust museums, resource centers, and university enclaves that are already contaminated by the ideas and the prose of the "naturalizers."

But this brings us back to Harvard, and to the question its search committee was apparently unable to answer: why a Holocaust chair?

On this question, reputable scholars disagree. The distinguished historian Saul Friedländer, for example, a survivor himself and the holder of the Holocaust chair at UCLA, contends that without endowed professorships and the concomitant centers, the subject of the Holocaust would "not be taught in any significant way." But one wonders. Creating centers will certainly guarantee that the subject is taught. But in a significant way—that is, in a way that deepens apprehension rather than simply spreading jargon, ideology, and distortions both monstrous and trivial?

Already, in American high schools, the Holocaust has taken its place alongside such other causes *du jour* as values enhancement and AIDS prevention. Already, in American popular culture, the Holocaust is rapidly replacing Christmas as a marketable icon of man's *humanity* to man (see the Holocaust Memorial Museum, with its carefully calibrated upbeat message; or see *Schindler's List*). Already, in the Jewish community, well-meaning organizations and individuals are mindlessly sponsoring Internet "sites" offering a "Holocaust cybrary" or a "virtual tour of Dachau." Already, an academic conference has been scheduled in Washington on the subject of "Deaf People in Hitler's Europe," where for four days scholars in three separate victimological fields—"Holocaust Studies, Deaf Studies, and Deaf History"—will have an opportunity to "interact."

Do we really need more of this?

Unresolved issues still swirl around the Holocaust. Many of those issues are historical, having to do not only, or even primarily, with the Jewish victims of the Nazis but rather with the perpetrators, the bystanders, the churchmen, the war planners, and everyone else whose acts of commission or omission ended in the annihilation of European Jewry. Other issues are political, moral, and theological. One does not need separate academic centers in order to consider them "in any significant way." To the contrary: *none* of them is susceptible of being addressed by the sort of witless and malicious theorizing that would assign, for example, co-responsibility for the catastrophe to "the sexism of Nazi ideology and the sexism of the Jewish community," and that is all too characteristic of "cutting-edge scholarship."

IN THE end, notwithstanding Debórah Dwork—currently at work on her own "gendered analysis" of the Auschwitz death camp—Harvard's "appalling" lapse in failing to fill its Holocaust chair may not be appalling in the least. Rather, the university should be commended for embarking, however inadvertently, on a sensible path. Now, if scholars who still study and teach about the Holocaust in a serious way were to speak up against those bent on transforming the murdered Jews of Hitler's Europe into so many "variables," "case studies," and "gendered" objects, we might yet begin to see a slow rotation of the wheel toward sanity and human decency.

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Our Hispanic Predicament

Linda Chavez

In Los Angeles this past February, a crowd of over 91,000 fans, made up predominantly of Latinos who live and work in southern California, gathered for the Gold Cup soccer match between the Mexican and U.S. national teams. They did not come to root for the home team. Rather, they booed and whistled through the singing of *The Star Spangled Banner*, and then proceeded to pelt the players on the American team with food, bottles, and cans.

The incident provoked days of coverage in the local media, most of it antagonistic to the Latino community. In one of dozens of letters that appeared in Los Angeles newspapers, a Mexican-American fan himself complained bitterly that he and his young son had been sprayed with beer and soda by fellow Latinos for having had the temerity to display a small American flag. A player on the U.S. team noted that he and his teammates had been treated far better when they played in Mexico City than at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Dozens of other letter-writers expressed their disgust with Hispanic immigrants who were happy to take advantage of American jobs, education, medical care, and welfare benefits while spitting on American symbols.

Were this mini-riot and the reaction to it an aberration, or a glimpse into a disturbing future? To put it broadly, can the United States successfully assimilate its large and rapidly growing Hispanic population, or are Hispanics becoming a permanently aggrieved and permanently volatile minority? These questions are already creating intense anxiety in California, home to some three million Hispanic immigrants as well as nearly seven million U.S.-born Hispanics, and they will increasingly agitate communities elsewhere. By the year 2008, Hispanic-Americans, currently 28.5 million strong, will outnumber blacks and form the single largest minority group in the country. In 50 years, if trends hold, they will comprise one-quarter of the total U.S. population. Not since the first decades of this century has the United States experienced so intense and far-reaching a demographic shift.

The implications of this shift have alarmed opinion-makers and policy analysts on both the Left and the Right, provoking calls for an immediate curtailment of immigration from Latin countries. There is, of course, nothing new in this: Spanish-speaking immigrants are hardly the first to stir apprehension in the hearts of native-born Americans. It was once a commonplace of elite opinion that the millions of Jews and other Europeans who were pouring into American ports at an unprecedented rate would not only fail to assimilate but would become, as a Harvard economics professor warned in a full-page *New York Times* advertisement in 1913, "a menace to Anglo-Saxon civilization."

But if it is tempting to dismiss today's warnings

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as no less fallacious and misplaced, the fact is that our situation is far more complicated than it was 75 years ago, and our predicament correspondingly more serious. Among other things, the United States itself has changed dramatically over the course of the century; while it remains a magnet with great powers of attraction to immigrants of all kinds, its ability to absorb them may have declined.

ONE PROBLEM in getting hold of the current situation is that the people whom the federal government labels as Hispanic hail from 24 separate national points of origin, have lived here for disparate amounts of time, and occupy a wide range of positions on the ladder of social and economic achievement. By far the largest sector comprises the eighteen million Hispanics of Mexican ancestry, of whom, it is important to remember, more than ten million can trace their roots in the United States for at least two generations. Another group of four million is made up of immigrants from Central America—mostly El Salvador and Guatemala—and South America, followed numerically by the three million Puerto Ricans who live on the U.S. mainland. Cubans—including the generation of refugees who fled the Communist takeover of the island in 1959, their children and grandchildren, and the more recent refugees of the 1980's and 90's—form the smallest group at 1.1 million. Finally, the federal government counts another two million persons as "other Hispanics," a hodgepodge that includes everyone from Dominicans to Spaniards.

In education and earnings, there is good news and bad about this remarkably diverse collection of people, but even the bad news is not as bad as it is often portrayed. Thus, most Hispanics of South American and Cuban descent (with the exception of recent Cuban refugees and recent immigrants from some of the Andean countries) are virtually indistinguishable in economic terms from the white American population at large. The real distress is in the Puerto Rican community, where a large number of people display a profile closer to poor American blacks than to any other Hispanic group, living in single, female-headed households, bearing children out-of-wedlock, and failing to participate in any way in the labor force.

This is in part a reflection of the unique status of Puerto Ricans in the United States: citizens by birth, they can migrate at will from the island to the mainland, where they are automatically eligible for the full range of welfare benefits. In New York, where one-third of all mainland Puerto Ricans live, their welfare rate is higher than that of any other group; already, generations have been mired in a destructive culture of dependency. Yet even so, circumstances vary: Puerto Ricans, too, are not monolithic, and earnings among those who *are* gainfully employed are higher than in any other Hispanic group except Cubans. Puerto Ricans also complete high school at rates similar to whites and significantly higher than Hispanics of Central American, Mexican, or Dominican origin.

While the plight of Puerto Ricans—and to some extent Dominicans, who share some of the same syndromes of dependency but are also more likely to be in the labor force or to be acting as entrepreneurs—represents a severe challenge in the Northeast, the bigger challenge nationally is posed by the enormous population of Hispanics of Mexican descent throughout the West and Southwest and in places like Chicago in the Midwest. Here again the picture is a mixed one.

Until a decade or so ago, Mexican-Americans trailed far behind the general populace according to most social and economic indicators. Contributing significantly to the lag was simple discrimination. Unlike American blacks, Mexican-Americans were never legally prohibited from voting or attending school with whites, but widespread anti-Mexican sentiment meant that, as a practical matter, the door to better jobs and better neighborhoods was closed to them. Conditions began to improve with passage of the civil-rights legislation of the 1960's, but then another circumstance intervened to slow down progress.

Thanks to a 1965 change in immigration law that henceforth gave priority to relatives of persons already living in the United States, a tide of poorly educated, non-English-speaking Mexican immigrants began to wash over the towns and cities where established Mexican-Americans had lived for decades. These new arrivals, their ranks swollen still further by substantial numbers of illegal immigrants, exerted a marked downward pressure on wages in California in the 1970's, especially for low-skilled Mexican-American males. Not until the 1980's, according to a recent study by Kevin F. McCarthy and Georges Vernez, did wages resume a healthy growth. But in that decade, and despite the continued arrival of new immigrants, Mexican-Americans made gains according to every measure of social and economic well-being—including education, an area in which this group has traditionally stood far behind others.

What is true of Mexican-Americans, at least those well established in the U.S., is true of immi-

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grant Hispanics on the whole. A recent study by Gregory Rodriguez of a five-county region in southern California showed about half of U.S.-born Hispanics and 34 percent of foreign-born Hispanics living in middle-class households in 1990; the latter figure in particular marks a significant improvement from earlier years. This upward mobility is driven primarily by the fact that families work together and pool their resources to get ahead—the same path classically taken by earlier immigrant groups from Europe.

Except among Puerto Ricans and the most recent immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere, then, the real problem in the Hispanic community is not a lack of economic mobility. The real problem is that, whatever the degree of their economic success, only haltingly are Hispanic immigrants becoming part of the social, political, and cultural fabric of the U.S. The anecdotal and statistical evidence attesting to this fact is, unfortunately, abundant, especially in relation to Mexicans.

One key indicator is the rate of naturalization. Even after nearly twenty years of U.S. residence, it seems that fewer than one in five Mexican-Americans chooses to acquire American citizenship. Another indicator is language. As of 1990, three-quarters of Mexican immigrants who arrived in the 1980's still spoke little or no English. About one quarter of *all* Mexican immigrants have not learned to speak English even after decades in the U.S.

What these numbers reveal is that many Mexicans straddle two worlds. While living and working in the United States, they listen to news from their native country on Spanish-language radio and television stations, make frequent visits across the border, and send money back home to the tune of $4 billion a year. Once they have gained some financial security, they hope to return to Mexico permanently.

As if to muddy the waters still further, the Mexican government has begun to take an aggressive interest in its former nationals. Its most visible step thus far has been to adopt a law allowing émigrés and their offspring to apply for an attenuated form of Mexican citizenship, including the right to own property in Mexico and to hold a Mexican passport. As soon as the law went into effect this past March, hundreds lined up at consulates throughout the United States to apply for the new status, many simply as a way of asserting their Mexican identity. As one applicant proudly proclaimed, "Mexico is our roots after all. We have been in this country a long time, but we can't forget where we came from."

If second-generation Mexican-Americans fail fully to assimilate, however, it will not be primarily on account of the actions of the Mexican government. America's family-reunification policy, in place since 1965, virtually guarantees that Latino immigration will increase yearly. Although Congress has fiddled with current immigration quotas by enlarging the number of skills-based slots, and adding preferences for so-called "diversity immigrants" (mostly from Africa and Eastern Europe), the proportion of Mexicans continues to grow. Each year, on average, 100,000 Mexicans arrive legally, and many more illegally.

This constant influx from a single country is unprecedented in American history, and is unquestionably a factor inhibiting the successful assimilation of Mexicans already here. Although politicians are wary of addressing the issue directly, for fear of being called racist, the irony is that both recent immigrants and America itself would have much to gain if fewer Latinos were admitted, allowing time for those here to learn English, improve their skills, and become Americanized.

Still, the single greatest threat to the assimilation of Hispanics is not U.S. immigration policy but U.S. education policy: specifically, the entrenched requirement of bilingual instruction in American public schools. Initiated as a temporary program to assist children in their native language while they were learning English, bilingual education now traps hundreds of thousands if not millions of Hispanics in classes where—for years on end—the instruction is almost entirely in Spanish. So rigidly is the law carried out that even children who already speak English are compelled to enter bilingual courses if they score poorly on standardized tests and live in families in which at least one family member speaks Spanish. The predictable consequence is that English—the language of the workplace and an essential tool for advancement—is never effectively learned.

A particularly shocking aspect of bilingual education is that Hispanic youngsters are virtually the only group of non-English-speakers who have been subjected to it; with rare exceptions, children from other language groups are immersed immediately in English or provided with English-as-a-second-language instruction from the moment they enter public schools. Even more scandalous is the Department of Education's insistence on bilingual education despite a complete absence of empirical evidence showing that it does any good at all.

It is true that bilingual education has the support of most Hispanic advocacy organizations, to whose

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members it brings a steady stream of jobs. But Hispanic parents themselves are far less enthusiastic. A 1995 poll conducted by the Center for Equal Opportunity showed overwhelming support for instruction in English as quickly as possible. Two-thirds of the parents surveyed, in fact, wanted full English-language immersion for their children. Californians will have an opportunity this month to vote on a ballot initiative that will sharply curtail if not effectively eliminate bilingual education in that state. Although Latino politicians and organizations, backed by the Clinton administration, have geared up to lobby against it, public-opinion surveys show that a majority of Hispanics favor the initiative.

IMPORTANT AS is the task of teaching Hispanic children English, far more is at stake in this debate than effective pedagogy. The central question is whether the public schools can serve, as they have done in the past, as the main instrument of assimilation for the millions of Hispanic youngsters who now attend them. In this regard, the current fascination with multiculturalism and diversity in public education bodes ill indeed. America's elites are themselves confused today about what it means to be an American, let alone about whether it is desirable for those who immigrate here to consider themselves part of what used to be regarded as a common culture. Is it any wonder that newcomers are moving more slowly to embrace an American identity, especially if they happen to be Mexicans whose homeland is nearby and who encounter so many fellow nationals in their day-to-day lives?

Paradoxical as it may seem in light of America's grip on popular culture throughout the world, the barriers to cultural assimilation *within* the United States are more formidable today than at practically any other time in American history. These barriers, in large measure, are ones we have erected ourselves. If Mexican-Americans, even as they move up the ladder of social and economic success, continue to cheer Mexico's soccer team and jeer the United States', our own failures of national self-respect will carry the lion's share of the blame.

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The Lost Airman—A Memoir

Merrill Joan Gerber

On February 6, 1943, my cousin Henry Sherman, the most beautiful soldier I had ever seen, disappeared into thin air over a place called New Guinea. I had expected this news ever since he taught me to sing the song of the Army Air Corps:

> *We live in fame, go down in flame,*
> *Nothing can stop the Army Air Corps.*

Before this, when he wrote our family from flight school, I had already begun to worry. One letter, which my mother read to us, alarmed me in particular:

> Dear Folks,
> Flew like an angel yesterday. Things are getting tougher.
> I'm really learning how to twist that plane around the skies. . . . I like flying upside down best of all.

It was clear to me, from the times my father had held me upside down, that Henry would become dizzy and be unable to steer his plane.

After his graduation from flight school, Henry came home on his last furlough. My grandmother told him she was worried about his going so far away, and began to cry a little. Henry took a silver dollar from his pocket and tossed it in the air. "My lucky silver dollar, Gram," he said. "It always lands heads up. See, I scratched my name on it. I'll be just fine."

He let me touch the dollar, then lifted me high on his shoulder while my father took a picture of us. The sun, glinting off the gold pilot's wings on the front of his hat, thrilled me and made me happy. Wherever Henry was, life was exciting. The brim of his hat was stiff, the points of his shirt collar were ruler-straight, and his sleeves had a sharp crease from shoulder to wrist. He gleamed with perfection, whereas my father, who did not get to fight in the war because of me, because he had a wife and a child, always dressed in baggy pants, his shirt pulled out at the waist. His curly hair was wild and unruly, and sometimes he forgot to shave. Because he had an antique shop and worked with old furniture and dusty statues, his fingernails were always grimy.

Sometimes I wished that Henry, who was exactly twenty years older than I (we shared the same birthday, March 15), could be my father. He knew what I needed. He promised to send me presents from wherever in the world he landed his plane, from every base, from every faraway city. "I will think of you wherever I go," he told me, kissing my cheek hard with his beautiful lips. "I will send you dolls and fans and little bells and carved peacocks with great colorful tails."

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I was four, almost five, and I adored him. Our mothers were sisters, although his mother, Eva, was twelve years older than mine and was born from a different father. She was tall and very magnificent. She wore great white corsets with laces and hooks and had no hesitation pulling off her dress in front of me if she chose to, making me look at her flesh, the garters with which she held up her stockings, her shimmering large breasts. My own mother was thin and modest. She dressed with her face and half her body in the closet, letting me see only the curve of her bare back. Sometimes she even carried her nightgown into the bathroom to put it on.

A third sister, my Aunt Greta, born two years after my mother, had no husband, no children, and she lived with my mother, father, grandmother, and me in the house in Brooklyn because she had no choice and nowhere else to go.

Aunt Eva lived not in Brooklyn but the Bronx, not in a house with a backyard and a front garden but in a tall apartment building with a marble foyer and an elevator. Her husband, my Uncle Eddie, had been a prizefighter. Though he was short and very solid, he did not scare me, even with his broken nose. In addition to Henry, they had two other sons, Irving and Freddy, one older than Henry, one younger. All three were handsome and fun to be with; I was proud to be related to them.

The war, to a child in Brooklyn in the 1940's, meant several specific things: you were not allowed to interrupt a news broadcast, especially if your father tilted his head toward the radio and held up his hand to stop you from speaking; you were encouraged to make balls out of silver foil from chewing-gum wrappers and discarded cigarette packs found in the street; and you were urged to give up any costume jewelry or beads that you had in your jewelry box. The tinfoil balls would in some way help our boys win the war, whereas the beads and rings could be traded for food to the wild men of New Guinea should our boys happen to crash-land in the mountains and need to barter with the natives. All children were urged to buy war stamps for 25 cents each, to be pasted into a little book. Eventually, when the book was filled up, a war bond could be purchased. This would also help win the war.

Winning the war was what we had to do in order for Henry to come home safe and be with us again. Fighting the war meant that we had to draw black curtains over our windows when the blackout alarm was sounded. Giving up new leather shoes, lamb chops, and sugar to make cakes would mean there was more for the boys to have. It was all quite simple. If we did those things, Hitler would be destroyed.

AFTER HENRY'S disappearance, my family waited for news, any kind of news except a telegram. The fact that Henry had disappeared was bad enough, but everyone in my family and in my house was certain he was alive, which was good. The sight of telegram boys on bicycles was dreaded by everyone throughout our neighborhood, for they had the power to deliver the worst news of all: that someone's son had been killed and would never come home.

Mothers whose sons were killed in the war were given gold stars to paste in their window, just as I (who was in kindergarten) was awarded a gold star when I knew my numbers or colors or could tell the correct time on the clock in the classroom. My Aunt Eva did not get a gold star for two reasons: one was that Henry was not proven dead, only "missing in action"; and another (I assumed) was that she had no window facing the street on which to paste a gold star. Privately I wondered if she might want to move to a one-story house (preferably in Brooklyn, near us) to display her star if the telegram boy ever delivered the worst news of all.

Lost boys were not new to our family. I already had a lost uncle, my mother's older brother Sam, who my grandmother felt certain was still alive. Now her daughter had a missing son, too. I imagined that some day I would probably also be required to have a missing son, something I did not look forward to although I recognized that it brought you a great deal of attention and visitors and phone calls and allowed you to go to your room to cry because you were having "a very hard time of it." Everyone in my house did a great deal of crying.

My grandmother, from the time her son was lost, long before I was born, insisted on leaving the front porch lit every night because she expected Sam to come walking in the door. She consulted fortunetellers as to his whereabouts. She took part in séances. Others in the family just assumed he had drowned. He had gone fishing with friends on the eve of Yom Kippur—in a storm, no less—a very bad time to have an outing since (as my Aunt Greta explained to me) that was the night all Jews were required to begin 24 hours of fasting to atone for their sins. Sam should have been in *shul*, praying to God.

I could understand the lure of fishing. My father often took me, in a rowboat in Prospect Park or on

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a pier at Sheepshead Bay, but we never went at night. What would be the point? How then could we see the sunshine on the water, the silvery dance of a fish on the line, the desperate struggle of its flapping fins on the wooden floor of the boat or pier, the heaving of its gills as it gasped for air, its final scaly stillness after it gave up the fight at last?

My mother told me that after her brother disappeared on that stormy Yom Kippur night, she—though only seventeen—had been summoned many times to the morgue to look at the faces of drowned men in case one of them might be Sam. My grandmother could not be asked to do it, nor could Aunt Greta. When I begged my mother to describe what the dead men looked like, she refused. But she assured me that even though the $1,000 insurance policy would have paid off the mortgage on the house if one of the dead men turned out to be Sam, she was glad that none ever did.

Between my grandmother still thinking Sam would come marching in the door, and my Aunt Eva certain Henry would hike out of the mountains in New Guinea and phone her from somewhere, I felt thankful my father came from a family of no missing sons and had no expectations that ghosts would appear at the door. Now and then he threatened to join up and fight in the war because he felt useless not being "over there"—but my mother and I begged him to remember how much we needed him over here.

In the weeks following Henry's disappearance, my Aunt Eva came over many Friday nights with her boys Freddy and Irving—really they were men—to share my grandmother's boiled chicken and her *kreplach* soup. (Uncle Eddie still played poker with his cronies on Friday nights, though Aunt Eva said he had gone to pieces since Henry was missing and would never be the same.) After dinner, as soon as we all got to talking, Aunt Eva would take from her purse the letter written by Henry's commanding officer and read it to us once again to prove there was still hope:

> Dear Mrs. Sherman:
>
> How it pains me to write you this, the saddest duty of my life. Your son was a fine young man, a good friend of mine. I knew of his devotion to you. . . . All I can do now is tell you what we know happened on the 6th day of February, 1943. On that day we took a flight of our ships to Uau, New Guinea. Six in all. Over the Uau airport we were attacked by about forty Zeros and some Bombers. Henry was flying a ship called "Early Delivery" with Lt. R. H. Schwensen, Cpl. Erickson, Private Faun, and Private Piekutowski. The Zeros came in fast and four were diving at Henry's ship. He went near the [air]port in a turn and from then on—no one is sure. It's not anything to help your feelings, but the Japs lost 26 in this fight to (I am sorry to say) our one. In this land of thousands of miles of jungles, mountains, and God knows what, anything is possible. But all we can do is look and try to find his ship. . . . As long as we are in New Guinea—we'll be looking.
>
> These letters are harder to write than the war—Henry was my friend and Buddy—and if there is any way to find him, we will do it. You can rest assured in that.
>
> Yours sincerely,
> Robert. L. Ward,
> Captain, 33rd Troop Carrier Squadron

Through the War Department, Aunt Eva had managed to get in touch with the Schwensens, the parents of Henry's co-pilot, who lived in Wichita, Kansas, and now the two mothers began to correspond. Aunt Eva read us Mrs. Schwensen's letters, too:

> Dear Mr. and Mrs. Sherman:
>
> I know it will help you out to know there is [another mother] who had a son on Robert's plane besides us—her husband is a lieutenant in New Guinea. He talked to a native down there and the native said he knew where Robert's plane was and so they have sent a group of natives to map out a way for the investigators to get in, as the area is very remote and the jungle there is very dense. Her husband said at the time of their flight, they were carrying food as cargo, so if the boys weren't hurt, they'd be able to exist quite a while on the food which was aboard. He also said that they don't think the boys are prisoners of the Japanese because of the remoteness of the area where the plane went down. I am glad you have so much faith and courage, because I really think that in itself will help the boys wherever they are. This gives all of us added hope that the boys will ultimately be reached by this rescue group and trust by now that we will hear something definite and that they are all well. Should we hear further shortly we will give you the information providing you do not hear before we do.
>
> With best wishes we are,
> The Schwensens

"So anything is still possible," said my Aunt Greta.

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"Anything is possible," agreed my mother. "And if there is any way to find him, they will."

"I know he'll come back," I added, though I was not sure at all.

It was on this same night that my cousin Freddy announced to Aunt Eva that he had gone downtown to enlist: "I'm going to train as a navigator. I told them I want to be sent to the Pacific. I'm going to get the bastards that got my brother."

"Oh please!" Aunt Eva cried. "Don't do that to me."

BY AUGUST 1943, when Freddy had been shipped out to the European theater with the 82nd Airborne, my Aunt Eva got another letter:

> Dear Mr. and Mrs. Sherman:
>
> On July 5, Jimmie Campbell, who is now a captain, and who had been in the South Pacific area for nearly fifteen months, returned home from New Guinea. He was the leader of the flight on February 6th when Robert's and Henry's transport was apparently lost. He came to our home and talked to us a long time. He does paint a very dark picture for us as to the boys' safety. Of course, he was also giving us the Government's viewpoint as to their being lost and, as you already know, the Government does not hold much hope for the boys' safety. Nevertheless, they also do not have sufficient proof. The boys could still be safe because the plane has not been found. He explained all matters in detail as to how it happened that fateful day. He said they all really expected to be shot down when the enemy appeared on the scene that day. Anti-aircraft fire from our ground forces and fighter planes shot down 28 Zeros out of about 38 that day; but two Zeros broke through somehow and pounced on our boys' plane and apparently they were the victims.
>
> We want to quote to you from a letter from our eldest son, who is training in this country as a pilot, as follows: "I have thought over and over again many times the conversation Robert and I had in San Antonio, when he said that he knew just what to do in case he was face to face with a situation . . . he said he would use his demolition equipment to destroy his plane after everybody had taken to the parachutes. This is the reason they haven't found his plane. It had secret radar equipment which he swore to destroy before crashing. He had rehearsed this action over so many times in his mind that it was just part of him. I just know he is alive somewhere."
>
> So you see we have not given up hope as yet and we do not want you to either. Still trusting and hoping for the safe return of all our boys missing.
>
> With best wishes we are,
> Bess and Justus Schwensen

Freddy sent me an embroidered silk blouse from Belgium with a matching skirt whose bodice laced up high at the waist, and a china doll I named Alice, for whom my Aunt Greta made a head of hair out of black wool. I could braid this hair, though it was not as good as the blonde hair on the heads of certain dolls my friends had, the sort of doll that cost too much for my parents to buy.

Aunt Greta joined the Red Cross and spent days at the synagogue, making bandages out of gauze and knitting socks for the boys overseas. I often went with her, sitting at long tables with the other women. If sheets of loose tinfoil had been brought in, I was given the job of adding them to the growing silver ball whose purpose in the war effort I did not exactly understand, though a silver ball as big as a basketball was an impressive thing to see. My mother had begun to save the grease from cooked bacon in a tin can, although as Jews we were not supposed to eat bacon. My father hated the smell of it; my mother said the grease oiled the tanks and therefore she intended to cook it every day. It was her contribution to winning the war.

My cousin Freddy's plane was shot at over France. He got an arm and a leg full of shrapnel, and had to be shipped home to a hospital. My Aunt Eva cried tears of joy, and seemed oddly happy that her son's leg was infected and full of holes. When they cut out the 77 little pieces of metal, she put them in a velvet case in her jewelry box, where she also kept Henry's medals, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart. Whenever we went to visit her in the Bronx she let me hold the medals, which were cold, brown, and hard and did not seem like much of a present if you were never going to come home again.

The war was lasting so long it was making everyone crazy. Every time we went shopping and passed the house of Mrs. Carp on East Fourth, we stopped to contemplate the four gold stars in her front window. Aunt Greta always said to my mother, "My God, my God, how does she keep living?" And then we had to do the ordinary things, walk on to the bakery and the butcher and the drugstore.

Suddenly though, when no one expected it, the war ended. People rushed into the street, screaming and tossing confetti in the air. Strangers lifted

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me into the air and kissed me. I never saw so much love in my life. I felt proud that all this happiness had something to do with my work on the silver-foil balls.

IN NOVEMBER 1945, a neighbor told my Aunt Greta about an article in the *New York Daily News*. Titled "Lindy Over Shangri-La," it reported that Charles Lindbergh had discovered some American planes that had been forced to make emergency landings and then became stranded on a mountaintop in New Guinea. Aunt Greta wrote at once, first to the paper and then to Lindbergh—the address she was given for him was in care of the Ford Motor Company, Detroit, Michigan. She begged him to reveal, if only he could, that by some great good fortune her nephew was a survivor of one of those forced landings.

She watched out the window for the mailman every day, praying at the same time that the telegram boy would never stop anywhere on our block. She told me that Lindbergh, a brave man and famous flier, had also lost a son a long time ago, a baby boy who was stolen from his crib by a murderer. She knew that if the letter got to him, he would answer it. She knew he would understand what our family's pain was like.

When the letter came two weeks later, my aunt opened it as if she were unwrapping a precious jewel. She read us every word:

The Tompkins House
Long Lots Road
Westport, Conn.
December 4, 1945

Miss Greta Sorblum
405 Avenue "O"
Brooklyn 30
New York, New York

Dear Miss Sorblum:

I am extremely sorry to have to tell you in reply to your letter, that the newspaper report about my seeing an isolated place in New Guinea, cut off from communications, where several planes had made forced landings is untrue as are so many similar stories printed these days.

I want you to know that you have my deepest sympathy in your great concern for your nephew who has been reported missing. I wish I had information which might be of value to you.

Sincerely,
Charles Lindbergh

FORTY YEARS later, when I was living in California with children of my own, I had occasion to travel to Miami Beach. Aunt Eva was living then in one room of a decrepit 1920's retirement hotel on Collins Avenue, a block from the beach. She had lost the voluptuous flesh that had made her seem bigger than life when I was a little girl, and now appeared to me to have slowly vanished over the years.

She was waiting on the hotel porch. The minute we got to her room, she pressed upon me everything she could think of that was hers to give: an old slice of French toast wrapped in tinfoil that she had been planning to reheat in the toaster, a little china lamb that sat on top of her television, a nylon sweater beaded with pearls that she thought would look good on me at a formal dinner I was to attend that evening. She insisted I eat a big round cookie, of the kind we kids used to call black-and-whites, that she had been saving in her tiny refrigerator.

Both her husband and her eldest son Irving were long dead. My grandmother and my father were also dead. Her son Freddy, a successful investment broker, lived 2,000 miles away. When we began to talk of Henry, she told me that his best buddy had married Henry's girlfriend; together they had had three children. "Everyone is gone. Uncle Eddie. Irving. Sam. My mother and my father. It's all like a dream."

"I always thought it so strange that Sam and Henry were *both* lost," I said. "Two boys in one family."

"Sam wasn't lost. He was killed."

"He was *killed*? I thought he drowned in a fishing accident."

"No. Sam and his friends weren't going fishing that night. They were running rum up and down the coast. They were making a lot of money at it. Sam always had an eye for the quick buck. There was a rival boat that was stealing their business. They fired on each other. The coast guard got involved, who knows. Both boats were shot down. They both sank. No one survived."

"Grandma always thought he would still come home."

"We all think what we have to think," Aunt Eva said.

Before I left, my aunt and I looked through some old photos and came upon the one of Henry holding me on his shoulder at his last furlough: I am four, going on five, wearing a sweater and overalls and a knit hat with a pompom on it. My small hand is wrapped around the back of Henry's neck, and he—in his starched uniform, his Air Corps hat

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with his pilot's wings above the brim—shines resplendent.

Aunt Eva said, "I want you to have Henry's things—his letters from flight school, the picture album he sent me that shows him posing with all his airplanes and his buddies, the letter from his commander after he was lost, the letters from the Schwensens. Take good care of them. Tell your children so they know what happened."

IN 1989, a little more than a year after my Aunt Eva died at the age of ninety-two, my husband and I were having coffee and browsing through the *Los Angeles Times* when a back-page article caught my eye:

AIRMAN BURIED 46 YEARS
AFTER DEATH IN JUNGLE

> Leavenworth, Kansas—Nearly half a century ago, a young Army airman left his wife and family in Wichita to fight in World War II over the Pacific Ocean. On Friday, 1st Lt. Robert Schwensen was finally laid to rest here, a year after his remains were discovered by Australian gold prospectors atop a mountain in a dense jungle of New Guinea. Schwensen and four other men aboard a C-47 had been listed as missing in action since their aircraft was shot down by Japanese fighter planes in February 1943. Schwensen was buried Friday under overcast skies with an honor guard and a 21-gun salute at Ft. Leavenworth's National Cemetery. "At last he's going to finally be home where he belongs," said June Rockhill, the woman Robert Schwensen left behind in the fall of 1942. She was 18 at the time and had been married just three months. . . . Air Force officials in Washington said it is rare to find the remains of missing servicemen so long after World War II.

"Robert Schwensen!" I cried out. "Oh my God! I've got to call my cousin Freddy."

Freddy immediately got in touch with the Defense Department and learned that Henry's skeletal remains had also been found, in the pilot's seat on the left side of the transport plane's cockpit. His dog-tags were still around his bones, with his belt, his knife, his eyeglass frames, and his lucky silver dollar lying nearby. In addition to Robert Schwensen, whose body was on the right side of the cockpit, the bones of the other three airmen were intermingled in the back compartment of the plane. The government had been unable to locate any of the missing boys' families, and it was only when news of the plane's discovery appeared in a newspaper that a Schwensen relative living in California called for more information. Finally the family had been able to claim the body of their boy.

Freddy called me back the next day—hardly able to suppress the tears in his voice—to report that Henry would now be buried, with full military honors, in Arlington National Cemetery. The government was sending him Henry's lucky silver dollar and the few other personal effects that had survived the ravages of the years. Freddy said he was glad his mother had not lived to hear the news. "To know that they found my brother would have killed her."

After much searching through the phone book and many fruitless calls, I managed to find the address of E.W. "Swede" Schwensen, Robert's brother, and sent him the news that we, too, had discovered our boy's remains. He wrote me back at once:

> We just returned this week from Ft. Leavenworth National Cemetery where Lt. Robert H. Schwensen was buried six plots from his older brother, Capt. Justus Schwensen, a B-24 pilot killed over Hamburg, Germany. Our family also lost a third brother, Lt. Richard Schwensen (Infantry) killed at Remagen Bridge in Germany and is buried in the American Cemetery in Luxembourg. Mother and Dad are deceased, but my younger brother and myself attended Robert's funeral. . . . It's nice to have all this behind us now so that we can go on with our lives.

A three-star family, I thought to myself. How did they bear it?

I did not go to Henry's funeral, but one day when my grown daughters were in the garage looking through some of their old childhood toys, they unearthed a box of gold paper stars. I took one of them and pressed it in the corner of my bedroom window—my small salute to Henry, the most beautiful soldier I had ever known.

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OBSERVATIONS

Art, Politics & Clement Greenberg

Michael J. Lewis

FOR THREE decades, art criticism in America was the domain of a rule-giving prophet, and woe to those who drew his wrath. A few laconic paragraphs might launch a career or cripple it. Where his favor came to rest, as it did for a time on the paintings of Jackson Pollock, there followed national celebrity and success. At the peak of his power—so it was said—the number of paintings sold by an artist was a coefficient of the number of paragraphs he had bestowed upon the artist's work.

But there is more to the tale. The prophet also practiced the fine art of winning enemies while influencing people, and in the end there came to be too many of the former. Appropriately, a former disciple became the instrument of betrayal, publicly accusing the critic of deliberately destroying artworks that he had been charged to safeguard. There followed open scandal, disgrace, and ignominy.

So runs the myth of Clement Greenberg (1909-94), the most articulate and forceful voice in American art criticism in the postwar years and now the subject of a new biography by Florence Rubenfeld.* A journalist and a former editor of *New Art Examiner*, Rubenfeld has the tenacity of a born researcher, and is a regular truffle pig when it comes to tracking down former girlfriends and old cronies. Indeed, it seems that, in addition to Greenberg himself, everyone alive who ever knew him was extensively interviewed for this work. Whatever its faults, Rubenfeld's book thus provides a trove of information on a fascinating and formidable figure who acted as the principal spokesman for American art during the years when New York dislodged Paris as the artistic center of the world.

BORN in the Bronx, Clement Greenberg was the eldest of four children of first-generation Jewish immigrants from Lithuania. During his youth, some years of which were also spent in Norfolk, Virginia, his father advanced from buttonhole maker to candy-store owner to proprietor of a chain of clothing shops. The father was apparently a difficult type, alternately distant or choleric—traits that left their furrows in his son's character.

In Rubenfeld's account, Clement was something of a late bloomer. He studied at Syracuse University, where he discovered English literature but ignited no fires. Following graduation in 1930 he drifted through a series of jobs in newspaper offices and credit agencies, always with similar results: a good initial impression, followed sooner or later by a mutual parting of the ways. The same thing happened when his father set him up in a national business distributing neckties.

In 1934, while on business in California, Greenberg impulsively married a divorced librarian after a courtship of a few weeks. They moved in with her mother in Carmel, and a son, Danny, was born a year later. Again he made desultory attempts at office work, while investing most of his energy in writing short stories and poems. Soon divorced, he returned alone to New York, where he remained for most of the rest of life.

Within a few years, Greenberg

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* *Clement Greenberg: A Life*. Scribner, 336 pp., $30.00.

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had made contact with the group who would become known as the New York intellectuals: the critics and writers, chiefly Jewish and generally Trotskyist in their political sympathies, who were grouped around the magazine *Partisan Review* when it was refounded in 1937 (in the wake of the Moscow purge trials) as an anti-Stalinist publication. But Greenberg's own relation to the group was not quite as straightforward as Rubenfeld suggests.

In 1935, Greenberg translated into English *The Brown Network*, a publication of the "World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism" that documented Nazi espionage activities outside Germany. How he was drawn into this assignment, which was not simply a translation job but essentially the project of a Stalinist front, is a mystery Rubenfeld ignores. In fact, she altogether passes over Greenberg's politics in the turbulent decade of the 1930's, mentioning only his attendance at "a few, large public meetings" in 1937 and his burgeoning friendships with Harold Rosenberg and Lionel Abel, both of whom were likewise destined to become celebrated critics and whom Rubenfeld identifies as being "Communists or fellow-travelers" at the time. Although her lack of curiosity surely reflects Greenberg's own discreet silence on a phase of his life that he later renounced, it is an alarming trait in a biographer.

GREENBERG STEPPED into intellectual fame with his first major article, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," which appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1939. Although the essay is remembered today chiefly for having introduced the German word *kitsch*—lowbrow art or culture—into English usage, at the time it attracted attention for its analytical power and the ambitiousness of its intellectual reach. In his opening lines, Greenberg sketched out the problem as he saw it:

> One and the same civilization produces simultaneously two such different things as a poem by T. S. Eliot and a Tin Pan Alley song, or a painting by [Georges] Braque and a *Saturday Evening Post* cover . . . . [W]hat perspective of culture is large enough to enable us to situate them in an enlightening relation to one another?

The answer came in the form of a heady cocktail of Trotsky's politics and Bauhaus aesthetics. Greenberg traced the emergence of kitsch to the dislocations of the Industrial Revolution, the rise of universal literacy, and the creation of a market for accessible and affordable art objects. But he included under the category of kitsch not only the mass productions of American-style capitalism—those Tin Pan Alley songs—but the official art of both Nazi Germany and, much more controversially, Soviet Russia.

As Greenberg saw it, the repudiation of kitsch required, in turn, a vigorous defense of high art. But he had a particular mode of high art in mind. Greenberg was writing during a period of considerable artistic confusion in America, with four major movements contending in a stylistic free-for-all: the "American-scene" painters, from Thomas Hart Benton to Grant Wood; the social realists (Ben Shahn, Raphael and Moses Soyer, and others); the cubist-influenced painters of the "American Abstract Artists," a group formed in 1937; and, finally, the surrealists, devotees of a movement that had never cast deep roots in America but that was now being fortified by the arrival of European artists like Yves Tanguy.

The first two of these movements held no interest for Greenberg; to him, they were simply kitsch in the service of political programs. He also despised surrealism, a kind of neo-romanticism that was seeking (in his judgment) to return to the fictional notion of painting as a window into an imaginary world. In this he was taking an especially bold stand. Into the 1940's it was unclear whether the principal channel of pictorial modernism would be surrealism or abstraction; Greenberg's consistent and quite venomous polemicizing played a role in shifting intellectual opinion away from the former and toward the latter.

In "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg laid out his core argument in favor of abstraction. At its heart was the notion of the autonomy of art, with its corollary that the intrinsic nature of each medium would determine that medium's direction of development. In the case of painting, the direction was toward flatness; in the case of sculpture, toward volumetric clarity. But *content* in art—any content whatsoever, narrative, imitative, or political—was out. "Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself"—"itself" being its formal properties. This is not to say that Greenberg rejected the whole of Western art since the Renaissance. But for the moment and for the future, realism and imitation were no longer valid options: "The alternative to Picasso is not Michelangelo, but kitsch."

This formalist program Greenberg would follow without detour for the remainder of his career.* In themselves, his ideas were derived from European modernism, and in particular from the Bauhaus painter Hans Hofmann, whose lectures Greenberg had been attending. But the whole mental atmosphere of his thought as it revealed itself in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"—from the vocabulary of objectivity and historical inevitability to the dogmatic and frequently corrosive tone—was thoroughly Marxist. This tone, a novelty in art criticism, would linger in Greenberg's writing, like a child-

*Greenberg never wrote a book of theory, but he did publish a collection of essays entitled *Art and Culture* (1961), as well as a few slim monographs on individual artists. His criticism is in the process of being edited by John O'Brian; four volumes have already appeared under the auspices of the University of Chicago Press.

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hood accent that cannot be shed, long after he dropped the rest of his Marxist habits of mind.

GREENBERG'S ASCENDANCE in New York intellectual circles was interrupted only by a failed stint in the Army Air Force in 1943. In the early years, as Rubenfeld writes, he thought of himself primarily as a literary person, and it was more by default than by design that he found himself a professional art critic. Although his enemies later snickered that he could not stand the fierce competition in the literary world, in truth he was virtually the only one of the early New York intellectuals with any aptitude for or interest in painting and sculpture.* In this vacuum, especially in the 1940's, his judgments began to carry weight.

Following the war, Greenberg, by now an associate editor at COMMENTARY and the art critic for the *Nation*, moved to Greenwich Village, and his social life came to revolve more and more about the downtown art scene. Although he is chiefly remembered in those years for having catapulted Jackson Pollock to fame—in 1947 he pronounced Pollock "the most powerful painter in America"—in fact his role went much deeper.

Greenberg was the first to treat New York modern artists as a collective school rather than as so many provincial followers of high European modernism. He took the term "abstract expressionism," which had been used to describe German painters of the previous generation, and helped affix it to this "school," which he then relentlessly promoted in his reviews and essays. In the work of such artists as Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Willem de Kooning, and especially Pollock and the sculptor David Smith, he saw a vitality and jauntiness absent from the art of postwar Europe. In his writings, the artists' colony that huddled around grimy Eighth Street became nothing less than the churning center of a new international movement.

During these years, Greenberg's political views also shifted. As late as September 1941 he had predicted that if President Roosevelt tried to enter the war, America's working classes would refuse to fight. But with the lessons of the war behind him, and faced with the realities of Stalin's brutal occupation of Eastern Europe, he drifted away from Marxist orthodoxy. By the end of the 1940's Greenberg (in common with others around *Partisan Review* and COMMENTARY) had become outspoken in the cause of anti-Communist liberalism.

This process of political maturation culminated in Greenberg's public break with the pro-Stalinist *Nation* in 1951. Incensed by the magazine's coverage of foreign affairs, which consistently "parallel[ed] that of Soviet propaganda," he sent a letter challenging the magazine's editor, Freda Kirchwey, to explain herself. She refused to print the letter, even in a revised version, and warned Greenberg of a lawsuit if he proceeded to publish his "false, defamatory, and scurrilous" charges elsewhere. He did; she sued. A considerable number of American intellectuals—including Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Lionel Trilling, and Richard Rovere—eventually aligned themselves with Greenberg, and in the wake of the affair, Reinhold Niebuhr resigned as a contributing editor of the *Nation*.

THIS WHOLE episode, and much more about Greenberg's role in the formation of postwar American liberalism, is a story of considerable drama, which makes it all the more unfortunate that his biographer seems indifferent to or nervous about the issues at stake (at one point she frets that Greenberg had inadvertently become a "darling of far-right groups"). Her reticence seems even more culpable when contrasted to her sometimes embarrassingly full treatment of other areas of his life, then and later.

Greenberg's compulsive womanizing, for instance—often inseparable from his promotion of female artists—has long been legendary; in Rubenfeld's version, it verges on the grotesque. In the early 1950's he carried on a prolonged affair with the artist Helen Frankenthaler. Subsequent affairs, of which there were many even after his second marriage, seem to have been much more casual. Although Rubenfeld does not go so far as to suggest he demanded a *quid pro quo* for favorable notice, she does show how the culture of art schools—especially Bennington, where he taught intermittently, and where students had to meet privately with their professors for a weekly tutorial—brought out the seducer in Greenberg.

Another element in her tale of Greenberg's personal life, never narrated at length before, constitutes perhaps the most shocking segment of Rubenfeld's book. Following the break-up of his attachment with Frankenthaler in 1955, Greenberg began an intense five-day-a-week psychoanalysis with a disciple of Harry Stack Sullivan. In all, his treatment would extend over six years.

Sullivan himself had died in 1949, but his followers had devised a particularly virulent version of his ideas, a central tenet of which was that close personal attachments only reprise the tyranny of the family and should therefore be dissolved. Patients were provided with form letters to help them break off ties with siblings and friends. (In Greenberg's case, one casualty seems to have been his brother Martin.) Above all, patients were urged to avoid sexual monogamy, and were criticized if they spent too much time with a single partner. If this was free love, it was compulsory free love. In any case, it was hardly the sort of "therapy" Greenberg needed.

BY 1957, Greenberg had been dismissed from COMMENTARY after twelve years as an associate editor.

*Meyer Schapiro and Harold Rosenberg both frequently turned their hands to contemporary art criticism, but neither so consistently nor so successfully as Greenberg. Hilton Kramer arrived on the scene a bit later.

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(At fault was his viciously abusive temper, another character trait encouraged by the Sullivanian ethos.) After his removal he turned again to sustained art criticism. By now, however, much of what he had championed in the early 1950's was somewhat passé, and a dissenting movement had arisen that was hostile to abstract expressionism in method, theory, and, especially, attitude.

This was pop art, whose appearance in 1958 had the breath of scandal about it. Disdaining the high moral seriousness that was a badge of honor to the modernist, pop artists replaced it with camp. Far from banishing subject matter from the pictorial plane, the pop artist injected that plane with subject matter that was patently ridiculous: beer cans, light bulbs, and other artifacts drawn from the world of modern commercial imagery. In place of the aggressively masculine style of the abstract expressionists, here was an art form dominated by homosexual painters whose attitudes were in every respect opposed to the whiskey-and-fisticuffs values of Eighth Street.

Although he expressed some admiration for Jasper Johns, in general Greenberg was contemptuous of pop art, despising its frivolousness and unearned facility. To him it represented not just the ascendance of kitsch, but—gallingly—kitsch lifted out of Tin Pan Alley and ensconced in the Museum of Modern Art. Caught by surprise by pop's success, he responded by moving aggressively to promote a second wave of abstract artists, the color-field painters. Helen Frankenthaler was an early avatar of this trend, but the most celebrated practitioners were Morris Louis, Jules Olitski, and Kenneth Noland, the last of whom became something of a personal cause to Greenberg. In their paintings, gestural turbulence gave way to diaphanous washes of pure color, transparent as gauze or (to use their own favorite image) a veil.

Characteristically, Greenberg sought to promote these artists on the grounds of their historical inevitability. Gestural painting, he sweepingly insisted, had spent its force, and the long run of cubist-inspired art, based on the lattice of line and structure, was nearing an end. In its place the lineage of Impressionism would be revived, and color, no longer subordinated to a structural armature, would again be sovereign. To this new movement he gave a name: post-painterly abstraction.

It was a reach, and his amused fellow critics knew it. (Harold Rosenberg, a friend turned rival, burlesqued Greenberg's essay, "After Abstract Expressionism," with one of his own, "After Next, What?") But Greenberg was also in trouble from another and more dangerous development than pop art. In his prime, he was unusually effective in imposing his authority on an art world that had just emerged from a prolonged period of stylistic confusion and experimentation. In this he resembled the 19th-century English critic John Ruskin, whose program for a modern Venetian gothic was no less absurd than the other eclectic movements of the day but had the virtue of being strongly stated. But again like Ruskin, who came to loathe the sham palazzos of Oxford built in his name, Greenberg would discover that his theories, assuming a life of their own, might reemerge in forms he would hate.

Such was the case with minimalism, the radically reductive art of the mid-1960's that took to a logical conclusion the Greenbergian doctrine that painting tended inexorably to approach the condition of absolute flatness, and sculpture that of volumetric clarity. The favorite devices of minimalism—the fractured steel prisms and stacks of identical wooden boxes—dispensed not only with specific subject matter but with any and all substance whatsoever. In a work like Robert Morris's *Steam* (1968), consisting of nothing but a series of photographs of a steam vent dissolving into nothingness, one saw formalism at its most ruthless absolute—and, artistically, one saw a complete dead end.

IT DID not help Greenberg that he himself found minimalism vapid. By the late 1960's, though he was still promoting individual artists (including Kenneth Noland), he no longer represented a coherent movement or perspective, and over the course of the next decade his ideas became deeply unfashionable.

In fact, the enmity felt toward him was only partly based on his aesthetic positions. To be sure, to some people in the art world the problem with Greenberg had always been the narrowness of his formalism, which tolerated only one channel of aesthetic development and scorned deviation. But this was no longer particularly relevant: formalism, after all, was dead. Now a new critique took shape, and one with a decidedly political hue.

The new view would become crystallized in a book by Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1983), which placed Greenberg's opinions on art in the context of his anti-Communism. Greenberg, in Guilbaut's influential reading, was to be understood as an aesthetic cold warrior, one who promoted American art as a vehicle of American hegemony. Within a few years this view had found its way into introductory art-survey books for college students.*

But the final blow to Greenberg's reputation was the series of events alluded to at the outset of this essay. When the sculptor David Smith died in 1965, Greenberg was named a trustee of his artistic estate, which included a number of one-ton painted metal sculptures lumbering in the fields about Smith's rural studio in upstate New York. Such trusteeships are generally advisory in nature, but Greenberg took his role to heart.

A decade after Smith's death, the sculptures were found to be weath-

*For more on this point, see Hilton Kramer, "Greenberg and the Cold War," *New Criterion*, March 1993.

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ering rapidly and losing their coat of paint. Greenberg, however, preferred them in their unpainted form—in fact, he had always preferred them in that form. Knowing of this, the art historian Rosalind Krauss, a former intimate of Greenberg's circle, now undertook to play whistle-blower. Greenberg—so the charge went—was allowing to happen passively and posthumously what he had failed to persuade Smith to do while alive.

Like most career-ending scandals, this one was damaging not because it was so bad in itself but because it embodied most clearly what was felt to be the subject's characteristic flaw. That there was a defense—Smith's works were unfinished, and the peeling paint was only a primer coat—did not matter. The whole incident confirmed what everyone already "knew" about Greenberg: his arrogance, his smugly superior attitude toward the artists he wrote about, above all his contempt for the cardinal rule of etiquette that says a critic may observe and comment but must never participate in the creation of art.

Other anecdotes also swirled about, recapitulating old scandals: that Greenberg had crossed a line in advising French & Co. Galleries on contemporary art, or that he had promoted artists with the understanding that he would be given paintings as gifts (which he would then sell after their values rose). By the 1980's it became hard to find anyone willing to go on record with anything positive to say about Clement Greenberg, and to make matters worse, he returned the favor, feuding in his final years not only with adversaries but with those who loved him, and casting off old friendships with a feral snarl.

IN THE end, how does one assess Clement Greenberg? How important were his career and his ideas?

An odd discrepancy haunts that career. Greenberg did indeed represent a kind of arid intellectualism; his writings about art displayed the ruthless, frigid aspect of a logician's proof. In this connection it is instructive to compare him with George Orwell, another former Trotskyist who happened also to write from time to time for *Partisan Review*. In a famous article, "The Art of Donald McGill," Orwell examined the vulgar postcards sold at English seaside towns between the wars. This was kitsch, Greenberg's turf. But Orwell, instead of dismissing it, looked closely at the aesthetic conventions of the postcards and at their limited palette of themes: sex, nudity, drunkenness. He worked to reconstruct the moral atmosphere they expressed—a lower-middle-class respectability that tolerated a certain bawdy rebellion in restricted channels—and in doing so he struck off insights of a sort not to be found in Greenberg's work, where all is kept on a high plane of abstraction and objectivity, and human messiness never intrudes.

And yet, at the same time, the objective critic was often a source of markedly subjective judgments. In his interaction with artists, in particular, Greenberg freely abandoned analytic categories and resorted instead to the authority of his much-vaunted "eye." The Greenberg who was so precise in making Kantian distinctions, and so voluble in articulating them, paid taciturn visits to studios where his only form of communication was a peremptory grunt in front of something he liked, a slightly different grunt to signify the opposite.

Rubenfeld does not succeed in knitting together these two facets of Greenberg. In general, her book lacks a center; although it is based on much material and long preparation, it gives the impression of something incompletely digested, and we do not gain from it a sense of the complete man. She does, though, take a stand on the question of Greenberg's importance, entering a broad and convincing claim for the centrality of his role in the rise of postwar American art. But she does this in a way that leaves little for revisionist historians to disagree with.

Their version, at least, is all of a piece: the man who promoted American art as an instrument of United States foreign policy, tacitly collaborating in alleged CIA-sponsored shows of painting in Europe—a charge floated in David Anfam's *Abstract Expressionism* (1990)—was the same man who brought a veritably McCarthyite temperament to his aesthetic judgments, brooking no dissent and enforcing a stifling conformity. It is to Rubenfeld's credit that she does not endorse this foolish and tendentious view; unfortunately, she also does nothing to correct it.

PERHAPS THE real case for Greenberg's lasting importance rests on the fact that the art world today is still haunted by his ideas and prescriptions—if for no other reason than that virtually every one of them has been turned on its head. Today's wisdom is that art *should* have an explicit and direct political application; that the distinction between kitsch and high art is meaningless; and that subject matter and narrative content are more important than technique or form. As for the notion of a coherent and logical course of artistic development, intrinsic to every genre, that has been jettisoned in favor of a willed celebration of the provisional, the improvised, the personal, and the arbitrary.

The result, however, is not an improvement upon the cultural vitality of an earlier age but a distinct and disastrous decline. If, then, students in America's art schools continue to invoke "Greenbergian formalism"—and they do—that is because in a shifting sea, without fixed positions, it is a comfort to have a landmark, even a theoretically hateful one. As a foil, perhaps even as a secret ideal, a number of the things Clement Greenberg stood for—austerity, high intellectual integrity, the devotion to formal perfection—may, if we are lucky, be with us for some time to come.

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E.O. Wilson's Theory of Everything

Jeremy Bernstein

It is not uncommon for people approaching the outer shores of middle age to go slightly dotty. Lawyers and accountants who have led exemplary lives marry trophy wives and buy houses in Aspen. With scientists, the syndrome takes another form. Since most of their best work is done when they are young, older scientists, and often the most distinguished ones, sometimes come to feel that the world has already forgotten them. In his later years Einstein was a bit in this position, although he simply did not care, continuing to work on his unified field theory—his Theory of Everything—in complete tranquility. This kind of serene indifference, however, is rare. More often, scientists try to make another grab for the limelight before night descends.

Of many examples known to me, I will mention only two. Julian Schwinger, who died in 1994, was one of the greatest theoretical physicists of this century. Among other things, he developed quantum electrodynamics, the most accurate scientific theory ever devised—an accomplishment for which he shared the Nobel Prize in physics with Richard Feynman and Tomonaga Shin'ichiro in 1965. He was also my teacher (both undergraduate and graduate) at Harvard, and there was no scientist for whom I had greater respect. I was, therefore, appalled when, a few years before his death, Schwinger became an enthusiast for cold fusion. There was, and is, not a shred of evidence that this idea has any scientific merit, but it attracted an odd group of eccentrics and hustlers who welcomed Schwinger like a god descended from Mount Olympus—a hero. What is worse, I have no reason to think that Schwinger was insincere in his enthusiasm.

My second example is the biologist George Wald, who died last year. Born in 1906, Wald was educated at New York University and Columbia. In 1932, he won a fellowship to Berlin and there, in the laboratory of Otto Warburg, he became the first to identify vitamin A in the retina of the eye. This work led to the Nobel Prize in medicine, which he shared in 1967. Wald served for most of his career on the faculty of Harvard.

During the period of the Vietnam war, photographs began to appear of Wald dressed in a turtleneck shirt and wearing what looked like a ponytail as he addressed crowds of adoring youths on matters spiritual and holistic. One evening I happened to be present for one of these lectures at the home of Ruth Nanda Anshen, a woman in New York who published books by well-known scientists on general themes and who gave soirées in her large mansion off Fifth Avenue.

To this day I can see Wald, dressed in a black turtleneck and bent under a lamp as he read, gurulike, from a manuscript, his ponytail glistening in the light. Although I recall little of what he said, I do remember his making some observations about the proton that persuaded me he had less understanding of this subject than a typical undergraduate physics major. While he was droning on, I took the opportunity to study the reactions of I.I. Rabi, also in attendance that evening. Rabi, a professor at Columbia,

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was one of the most distinguished experimental physicists of this century, a trusted adviser to Presidents, and a great man who had zero tolerance for fools. Having spent over a year interviewing him for a *New Yorker* profile, I well knew the dangers of asking him a dumb question.

During much of Wald's talk, Rabi's eyes were closed, though a seraphic smile occasionally played across his face—a disturbing sign. When the lecture, or perhaps I should say performance, was over, Wald made the mistake of asking for questions. The first hand up was Rabi's. He was acknowledged with some flourish, and said: "There is something I have always been curious about. Why did *homo sapiens* have his origin in Africa and not in Canada or South America?" Wald, looking totally bewildered, rose to the bait: "That was not the subject of my lecture." "I know," deadpanned Rabi, "but I thought it might be somewhat closer to your area of expertise." The "somewhat" was especially good. His seraphic smile intact, Rabi then got up and left, with Wald looking as though the air had just been let out of his tires.

SO MUCH for background. Imagine my sinking feeling, then, upon seeing the title of Edward O. Wilson's latest book, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*.* For starters, I could not even find "consilience" in *The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary*—the only one I happened to have around. (It means something like "jumping together," and seems to have been invented in 1840 by a man named William Whewell, who used it in a book with the title *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*.) Just what we need, I thought, a title that is not in the dictionary. And then there was the subtitle: "The Unity of Knowledge." "Oh, Wilson," I expostulated, "you have now gone the way of all Walds."

Well, the news is not quite *that* bad. Although this book is indeed his Theory of Everything, Wilson, unlike Wald, has not lost his original scientific base. That, at least, is something.

Edward O. Wilson was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1929 and raised as a Southern Baptist. "More pious than the average teenager," he writes here, "I read the Bible cover to cover, twice." Loving nature, he also spent hours out of doors studying "ants, frogs, and snakes." His goal was to classify—to identify and give names to—the creatures he came across. But in the fall of 1947, when he entered his sophomore year at the University of Alabama, he met a young assistant professor named Ralph Chermock who told him that if he really wanted to become a biologist, as opposed to some sort of "naturalist" stamp collector, he had to learn about the Darwinian synthesis and modern genetics.

This experience transformed Wilson's life, and in reading about it I was reminded of something Rabi had once told me. He himself had come from the sort of Orthodox Jewish home where the Hebrew Bible was considered to contain all the cosmology anyone needed to know. But then he discovered in the Brooklyn public library an elementary book on the Copernican system, and he was never again able to regard his family's beliefs about the universe in the same light. "That was the church I failed," he said to me—a sentiment I am sure Wilson would understand very well.

Wilson's most famous work in science, which he began at Harvard in 1950, has to do with the social behavior of insects. His two books, *The Insect Societies* and *The Ant*, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1990, are classics. It is a commonplace that ants and other social insects behave in their colonies less like individuals than like the components of a unified brain. Now, the human brain consists of some 100 billion nerve cells, each of them connected to other nerve cells by hundreds, or thousands, of membranes—"wires"—along which electric currents pass. If we could make sense of these connections, they would tell us how the brain works in detail. But, assuming that individual ants in a colony are like cells in a brain, what is it that connects *them*?

That is the question Wilson sought to answer. It was a puzzle because ant colonies often operate at night, when the ants cannot see each other; and while they do communicate audibly, they do so only on special occasions. Wilson conjectured that the signals connecting them were chemical. Dissecting red harvester ants, he discovered tiny glands emitting what are now known as pheromones. With the aid of a young chemist named Fred Regnier, he then identified the active chemicals, and with the aid of a mathematician named William Bossert, he was able to construct a model of how the signals disperse in time. It was clear that ants do not go to school to learn to respond to these signals. They are born with this ability; it is part of their programming, an example of behavior determined by genes and ultimately by genetic molecules—that is, by physics and chemistry.

So far, so good. But after making these discoveries, Wilson and a few like-minded scientists, notably including the British biomathematician William Hamilton, began to extend the idea of genetically-determined behavior beyond the lower orders of insects, and in particular to develop a theory of the genetic origins of *human* behavior. This theory is often called "sociobiology," a term that Wilson may well have invented.

The idea that important elements of our behavior as individuals and in society might be "hard-wired" in our genes by physics and chemistry—and therefore basically not subject to improvement—drove some of Wilson's colleagues slightly berserk. The effect, one might say, was like dropping a pheromone into an ant colony. Staggering was

* Knopf, 332 pp., $26.00.

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the number of trees chopped down for the multipage diatribes against Wilson that appeared in places like the *New York Review of Books* by people like Richard Lewontin and Stephen J. Gould. No slouch when it comes to polemics, Wilson replied in kind—more trees. He also wrote books, including *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975), in which he defended and amplified his views.

To someone like me who has no professional stake in this controversy, it seems clear that sociobiology is part of the truth. The question is how much. The fact, to take an example, that there is an incest taboo in every human society, and that it develops automatically in children who have been raised together for the first 30 months of their lives (as Edward A. Westermarck first pointed out at the end of the last century) is clearly traceable to genetics. How this taboo is *expressed*, however, is societal, and varies from one society to another.

BUT THAT brings me to *Consilience*. The first half of this book is a very lucid tour of the "hard" sciences—physics, chemistry, and the like. (The list of people Wilson credits with helping him to expound the nonbiological sciences is most impressive.) What all these disciplines have in common is that they are reductionist: underlying the bewildering array of data is a set of units obeying laws that often display a remarkable mathematical elegance. In physics, the reduction goes down to the quark, which is the modern physicist's atom. In evolutionary biology, it goes down to the gene and its component molecules.

To be sure, as compared with biologists, physicists have it easy. If, for example, we want to study a particular electron, its own "biography" is irrelevant: we can assume that the electron running through the wires of our toaster is identical to an electron in the most distant galaxies. This is the basis of astrophysics and cosmology—and it works. In evolution, by contrast, biography is everything, a fact that makes for enormous difficulty. To understand, step by step, how some grouping of eukaryotic cells evolved into the person named E.O. Wilson, we would need a complete record of the "chance and necessity"—wonderful phrase—that caused one particular assembly of cells to survive when others died out, in a process repeated again and again over the whole course of human evolution. To put the distinction another way, starting from an array of electrons in the wires of a toaster I can guarantee the conditions under which my toast will be burned; starting from the eukaryotic cells, I have no way of predicting the emergence of E.O. Wilson.

Nevertheless, and all these difficulties notwithstanding, studying the underlying biological molecules can indeed lead to an understanding of the basic mechanisms of evolution. For someone like Wilson, the temptation must be irresistible to apply the lessons thereby learned to, essentially, everything. Hence the second half of this book, which constitutes Wilson's Theory of Everything. He genuinely feels that once we know enough about physics, chemistry, and biology, there will be nothing on earth we cannot explain. And by nothing, he means nothing. Thanks to the principle of "consilience," he writes in a typical statement, "even the greatest works of art might be understood fundamentally with knowledge of the biologically evolved epigenetic rules that guided them."

This sweeping assertion is put forward by Wilson in calm, measured tones. Indeed, virtually all of *Consilience* is written in a voice of statesman-like moderation. None of the opponents of sociobiology is mentioned by name, and the only polemics are reserved for people like Freud, who, so far as I know, is no longer in a position to write to the *New York Review of Books*. But Wilson's treatment of Freud does offer an insight into his method in this book, and its flaws.

In several pages devoted to the subject of dreams, Wilson begins by describing Freud's theories, which he then states are "mostly wrong." When I read this, I had the same sense of a rug being pulled out from under me as when I read some years ago that eating large quantities of raw carrots could cause cancer. (It turned out that the quantities involved came in freight cars.) Why was Freud "mostly wrong"? Because, according to Wilson, he did not understand the biological basis of dreaming—for example, the rise of acetylcholine in the brain during the dream state.

This sounds like a serious indictment until one asks oneself what it has to do with the *content* of dreams, which is, after all, what Freud was interested in. That the same thought seems to have occurred to Wilson is confirmed a few pages later when he remarks: "The findings from neurobiology and experimental psychology nevertheless say nothing about the content of the dreams." He then goes on to make the quite modest claim that he should have made in the first place—namely, that neurobiology, rather than invalidating Freud, can perhaps help to make Freud's theories "more concrete and verifiable."

A few years ago, you could buy a wonderful doll that looked like Freud. From its back there dangled a string. The temptation to pull it was overwhelming. When one did so, a recorded voice, in what passed for an Austrian accent, asked, "Vy did you pull my shtring?" Again and again in this book, I felt Wilson pulling my string.

AT ONE point in *Consilience*, Wilson constructs a dialogue between two individuals, a "transcendentalist" and an "empiricist." The transcendentalist holds that some tangible phenomena—perhaps even life itself—require a nonscientific explanation if they can be explained at all.

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By contrast, the empiricist, who has the proper consilience world view (and who gets most of the good lines in the dialogue), maintains that "all tangible phenomena from the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous, to the laws of physics."

How can one adjudicate between these two positions? Clearly, the transcendentalist argument is not susceptible of proof. To say that, for some phenomena, *no* scientific explanation is possible requires a leap of faith. But the same holds, if in the opposite direction, for Wilson's own "empiricist" position. He, too, can offer no proof that it is true; it, too, requires a leap of faith.

So let me propose a third possibility: for all practical purposes, the "long and tortuous" reductions to the laws of physics of which Wilson speaks are *so* long and tortuous as to render both views—the transcendentalist and the empiricist—indistinguishable. I can illustrate what I mean from the game of chess.

Chess is a determinate enterprise. If one follows the rules, there are, at any given point, a finite number of moves and a finite number of responses to those moves. This means that anyone in a position to consider in advance every move and every riposte could play a perfect game each and every time. Why then is chess interesting? Why are all games not perfect? Why, practically speaking, is chess an *in*determinate game?

The answer lies in the numbers. There are 20 possible opening moves by white, and 20 possible responses by black. But thereafter the numbers immediately start to increase. The engineer Claude Shannon, one of the creators of information theory, made the following analysis in the late 1940's. The average position involves about 30 moves and 30 ripostes; thus, at any given stage, the next move involves some 900 choices. Since in an average game there are about 40 moves, if one ran the whole chain from beginning to end, the number of choices one would have to examine would amount to 900 raised to the 40th power—or about 10 raised to the 118th power. To get some perspective on this absurdly large number—10 followed by 118 zeroes!—bear in mind that the age of the universe in seconds, according to cosmologists, is about 10 raised "only" to the 17th power.

The most powerful chess machine yet built—Deep Blue—can analyze about 200 million positions a second. Thus, to run the entire chain of an average chess game would take Deep Blue, in seconds, about 10 raised to the 110th power. If, in other words, Deep Blue had been running at top speed since the instant of the Big Bang, it would still not have made a dent in analyzing the average chess game. And this is only chess!

Wilson himself chooses to comment on chess machines, and he does so in a very revealing manner. Speaking about the limitations of artificial intelligence, he observes that chess machines work by "brute force." Although he does not expand on this remark, he must mean that human chess players do something that cannot be duplicated by a machine, something that does not rely on brute force. Indeed, he goes on to grant that no machine can truly replicate the human mind, since such a machine would have to embody the whole experience of the human race—a clear impossibility. But is this not tantamount to saying that even if consilience were in some sense true, for practical purposes it is useless? Or, to put it another way, that consilience is in the end not a scientific doctrine but a theological one?

For myself, although of course I cannot prove what I am about to say, I do not believe there is a Theory of Everything—not even of something as "simple" as physics. Einstein himself got nowhere when he set his sights too high, and other physicists who make the attempt tend to sound almost as shallow as George Wald. The Upanishads tell us to seek the source and not the shapes. Wilson cannot be faulted for seeking the source, but he is a long way from finding it.

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Books in Review

Kremlin Calling

Many Are the Crimes:
McCarthyism in America
by Ellen Schrecker
Little, Brown. 592 pp. $26.95

Reviewed by
James Nuechterlein

TREATMENTS OF the McCarthy era by radical writers are nothing new. Most of them, however, are so tendentious, and so awash in political bathos, that they can persuade only those already persuaded. Ellen Schrecker, a professor of history at Yeshiva University and a self-described radical, has set out to be more credible. As she says in the introduction to this wide-ranging study of domestic anti-Communism, her aim is to transcend the usual revisionist pieties, to "investigate" the various actors in the drama rather than "judge" them. Unfortunately, the book she has written honors only half of this intention, being at once both impressively investigated and utterly unconvincing in its all too frequent judgments.

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SCHRECKER BEGINS with a description of domestic Communism that is notable for its moments of candor. She admits—if grudgingly—that the American Communist party (CP) was "subservient to the Kremlin"; that the party's image as a criminal conspiracy "was persuasive in large part because it was based on reality"; that the Communists, while insisting on the most expansive possible definition of their own civil liberties, displayed no concern for the civil liberties of their enemies; that the CP was "secretive, authoritarian, opportunistic, and insulting" in its dealing with liberal allies in the Popular Front; and that, finally,

> despite the widespread contention that [Senator Joseph] McCarthy and his colleagues picked on innocent liberals, most of the men and women who lost their jobs or were otherwise victimized were not apolitical folk who had somehow gotten on the wrong mailing lists or signed the wrong petitions. Rather, . . . they had once been in or near the American Communist party.

Here we find, in short, ample evidence for the view that Communism in America during the first decade of the cold war was a genuine threat, and the reaction to it, however excessive at times, a reasonable act of self-defense. And yet every concession to the truth is immediately enveloped in Schrecker's account by a cloud of qualifications and extenuations. Yes, American Communists did follow the line dictated by the Kremlin, "but not everywhere, not all the time, and not in everything they did." Yes, the party "harbored" an "underground" that performed espionage for the USSR, but, she quickly adds, not all Communists were involved, much of the information gathered was unimportant, during some of this period the Soviets were our allies, and anyway the spies were motivated by their ideals. For Schrecker, the sins of the Communists turn out, on closer examination, to be not so bad after all.

Or if bad, not nearly so bad as those of their persecutors. Though conceding that the actual behavior

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of Communists made it easy to "demonize" them, Schrecker nonetheless insists that the image of the Communist party as a threat to national security was "built on perjury," and that participants in the anti-Communist crusade systematically resorted to "lies and dirty tricks." The true aim of McCarthy, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, and the other villains in her story was not to protect the nation against subversion but to destroy "the power of the Left."

This was, moreover, a Left to which the Communists had made a formative and in many respects healthy contribution. It is "because of the problematic nature of the CP's ties to the Soviet Union," Schrecker writes, that we tend "to overlook the more positive elements" of its agenda. In fact, she maintains, the party was a "progressive" force that "stimulated many of the most dynamic political and social movements of the 1930's and 1940's," particularly trade-unionism and the push for racial equality. Its demise in the face of the anti-Communist onslaught thus did lasting harm to the liberal cause.

Finally, looking back on the era, Schrecker wonders if the Communist party, for all its misdeeds, really warranted so ferocious a response:

> Were these activities so awful? Was the espionage, which unquestionably occurred, such a serious threat to the nation's security that it required the development of a politically repressive internal security system?

Her answer, needless to say, is no. At root, Schrecker suggests, Communism was just another "unpopular political movement," a tragic but not untypical victim of America's abiding intolerance of dissent.

Many Are the Crimes is, as I have already noted, a scrupulously researched book, and Ellen Schrecker possesses an obvious command of all the relevant literature. Unfortunately, these virtues are not enough in the end to keep her book from being a work of revisionist propaganda. All the documents she has read, the interviews she has conducted, and the facts she has been forced to acknowledge avail nought against her determination to salvage what she can of the "positive elements" in the Communist agenda.

It is a doomed quest. In her nostalgia for the days of the Popular Front, when Communists allied themselves with liberals and others on the broad American Left, Schrecker insists on separating the CP's Soviet connection from its "progressive" politics. Yet, as she herself documents in damning detail, on every issue of any consequence, foreign or domestic, the party acted strictly on instructions from its Soviet masters, following the tortuous twists and turns of the line laid down in Moscow. Even

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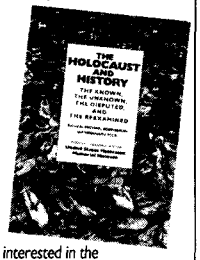

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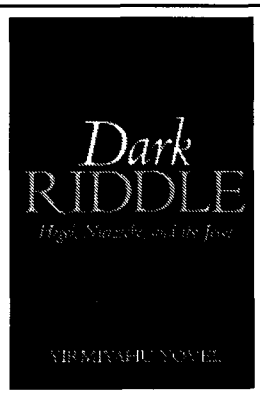
during periods of cooperation with others, Communists—as, again, Schrecker's own evidence reveals—felt free to deceive their allies as the needs of the party dictated. For the CP, the politics of the Popular Front was a politics of convenience.

It is true that not every member of the Communist rank and file was the self-conscious agent of a hostile foreign power. Idealists of various sorts and of varying degrees of idealism moved in and out of the party over the years. But even the most "idealistic" of them bears a burden of moral culpability for joining and remaining with an organization whose inherently corrupt nature they had to work so hard not to recognize. Some Communists came to grips with the true nature of their moral situation when, in 1939, they were asked—or, rather, ordered—to swallow the Nazi-Soviet pact; others postponed the day of reckoning until later; many evaded it altogether.



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AS FOR Schrecker's account of the anti-Communist movement, it is fatally marred by what she chooses to downplay or ignore. Thus, for instance, she scants the international context in which domestic anti-Communism flourished in this country, minimizing the obvious effects on American sensibilities of the cold war and especially the war in Korea. Civil liberties have never fared well anywhere during wartime, and it is no accident, as a Marxist would say, that the most fevered events of the anti-Communist crusade—blacklists, economic sanctions, and political dismissals—occurred while the U.S. was engaged in conflict against the Communist regimes of North Korea and China. Without the Korean war, Joseph McCarthy would likely have been but a minor footnote in American history.

This is not to excuse the excesses committed in the name of anti-Communism; but neither should such episodes be allowed to obscure the sober consensus that prevailed in America at the time. Schrecker complains bitterly about the crudeness of the anti-Communist view of Communism, but she allows herself to tar any and all opposition to the CP as "McCarthyism." She thus never comes to grips with the cold-war liberals and others on the Left who agreed with the social-democratic philosopher Sidney Hook that Communists in the U.S. had rights as heretics but not as conspirators—not to mention with those on the Right like Whittaker Chambers who opposed McCarthyism because of the damage it was doing to, precisely, the anti-Communist cause.

What all these people and millions of ordinary Americans understood is that the American Communist party *was* a conspiracy, the wholly subservient tool of Joseph Stalin—a monster of world-historical proportions—and of the totalitarian regime over which he presided. The remarkable thing is that, at least at some level of consciousness, Ellen Schrecker knows it, too. It is a pity that the incompatibility between the facts she cannot quite fail to notice and the ideological filter through which she interprets them should have led her to write a book of which the best that can be said is that it is incoherent.

Signifying

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature
edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay
Norton. 2,665 pp. $49.95

Reviewed by
Phillip M. Richards

ORGANIZED LIKE similar collections, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* will impress many college students and their teachers as a conventional survey. It includes the writings of acknowledged black authors like the poet Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-84), the ex-slave Frederick Douglass (1818-95), and the novelist Richard Wright (1908-60), and it is arranged in sections approximating the traditional chronological divisions of American literary history. Competent scholarly introductions by period specialists—William L. Andrews (18th and 19th century), Richard Yarborough (19th and early 20th century), Arnold Rampersad (20th century), and Barbara T. Christian (20th century and women's literature)—add to the impression of unexceptionableness.

If there is little here to startle the average student, scholars will similarly notice that the *Norton* editors have strayed far less from standard anthology form than did Benjamin Brawley in *Early Negro American*

PHILLIP M. RICHARDS *is an associate professor of English at Colgate who has spent this academic year as a fellow of the Institute on Race and Social Division at Boston University.*

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Writers (1935), or Sterling A. Brown *et al.* in *The Negro Caravan* (1941), two earlier collections that imaginatively arranged black writing less according to periods than according to its own most distinctive genres. Indeed, the new anthology's predictable surface is disrupted only by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his general introduction to the volume, and by a chapter on vernacular discourse edited by Robert G. O'Meally. These openly polemical sections do finally locate African-American writing within the ideology now dominant in black literary studies.

Before commenting on that ideology, it is worth noting how thoroughly the study and even the production of black literature have become, these days, a university affair. Gates's polite acknowledgment of M. H. Abrams, the chief editor of the now-nearly-canonical *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (first edition, 1962), reminds us of the mid-century academic boom in literary studies, a discipline that, by the time Abrams was chosen as editor, had already shed many of its old Wasp trappings and become increasingly diverse by ethnicity and class. Fittingly, the new *Norton*'s editors are also drawn from a cohort that began entering the profession of English in the 60's and 70's.

The resources (and the fashions) of the academy have proved decisive in a number of ways. They have, for example, enabled a new generation of scholars to unearth and reclaim the work of women writers like Maria Stewart (1803-79), Pauline E. Hopkins (1859-1930), and Angelina Weld Grimke (1880-1958), or to cast new light on a pivotal figure like William Stanley Braithwaite (1878-1962). Less tangible but no less telling is the air of confidence that pervades the anthology's aesthetic judgments. Reprinted in full here, for example, are Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* (1845), Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and W.E.B Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). It is thanks to the academicization of African-American studies that these once-obscure texts have become canonical in American literature.

Finally, the integration of black studies into the mainstream has meant a material revolution not only in scholarship but in literary creation—and this sea-change, too, is reflected in the new *Norton*. The late poet Robert Hayden may be the most striking example of a gifted black writer freed to create largely as a result of well-deserved and long-delayed appointments at Michigan and Yale, but the list of university-connected writers is by now very large. It includes, to name only some of those represented here, John Edgar Wideman, David Bradley, Ishmael Reed, Ernest J. Gaines, Michael S. Harper, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Rita Dove, June Jordan, and Sonia Sanchez.

But the embrace and "normalization" of black studies in the university also pose a problem—at least for those black professors who have been in the habit of stressing the ways in which the African-American tradition "subverts" or rebels against white cultural norms. Their particular dilemma may be thought of as a subset of a larger psychological confusion that characterizes a fair portion of the growing African-American bourgeoisie. Thus, as we learn from studies of black college students by Jacqueline Fleming, and from a spate of books by Brent Staples, Lorene Cary, Ellis Cose, and others, upwardly mobile as well as already successful blacks—that is, those who have achieved or are on the way to achieving the very integration into American society long sought by their elders—are often beset by feelings of ambivalence, displacement, resentment, and even rage.

In the *Norton* anthology, the pe-

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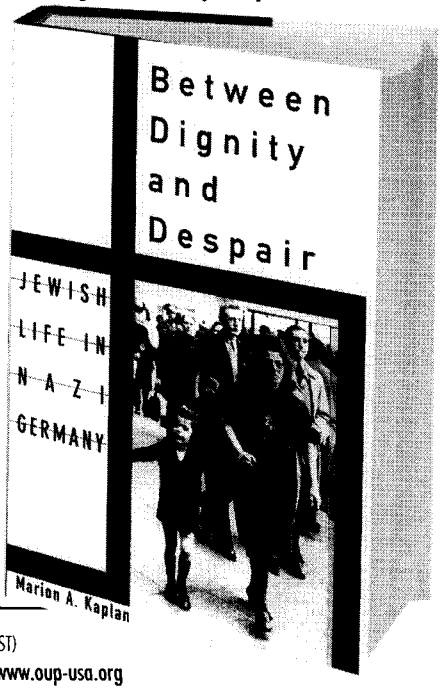

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culiar mental habits generated by the new conditions of integrated black life in America are best represented by the literary ideology of Henry Louis Gates. Indeed, the prolific Gates, who teaches at Harvard, has developed an entire professional style designed to give symbolic expression to the mood of black intellectuals who mean to keep up adversarial appearances while staying within "the system." In his introduction to *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Gates elevates this style to the status of a full-blown literary model.

The entire black literary canon, according to Gates's scheme, may itself be understood as an extension of the folk ritual of insult known as "signifying," a form of mock rebellion—think of Br'er Rabbit—in which a speaker's meaning is reversed and turned back upon himself for purposes of one-upmanship. To Gates, what is important about "signifying" is both its subversiveness and its playfulness: the invitation it extends to its audience, white as well as black, to join in a shared, knowing consensus of bad faith.

But if the content of "signifying" is one emblem of a distinctive black discourse, another is the vernacular nature of that discourse. Invoking the language of folk sermons, songs, and tales, Gates defines American black literature as a "talking book" or, alternatively, an "archive": an imagined institution in which the (adversarial) oral traditions of American blacks have become, in effect, their version of a literary canon.

GATES'S CONCEPTION has been very influential in the academy, where it serves to make a claim for the place of black literature within American high culture by grounding it, with a winning show of defiance, in low or folk culture. But what does any of this have to do with the writings collected in the *Norton Anthology*? To read the first sections of this long book is to see how limited and limiting is Gates's scheme. There is, in fact, no evidence that the earliest black writers in America were influenced by folk culture; nor did folk culture play a significant role in the main line of African-American literature for most of the 19th century.

Published African-American literature begins in Protestant poetry, spiritual autobiography, adventure stories, political writing, and the many popular forms of the late 18th and early 19th century. Not only did most black writers keep a careful intellectual distance from the folk, they tended, if anything, to adhere to a genteel bourgeois ideal of assimilation into middle-class Victorian culture. Even the recently recovered body of black women's writing shows the persistence of middle-class attitudes deep into the period of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's.

The folk-vernacular style in black literature made its first appearance in the late 19th century. But even then it subsisted for quite a long time alongside the more powerful genteel tendencies before it finally—and only partially—overtook them. Unsophisticated students who take the CD-Rom recordings of oral folk art accompanying the *Norton Anthology* for a rigorous historical representation of "African-American literature" will be poorly served by what is beginning to look like literary history overdetermined by black-bourgeois therapy.

THE LIMITATIONS of Gates's approach may be appreciated by considering an earlier figure with a rather different orientation. Sterling Brown, a professor at Howard University, was the author of an acclaimed collection of poetry, *Southern Road* (1932), as well as of critical works like *The Negro in American Fiction* (1937) and *Negro Poetry and Drama* (1938); he was also editor of the extremely valuable anthology, *The Negro Caravan*. Brown's "caravan" was shaped by his own commitment to literary realism, which he saw as a much-needed counter to earlier, ideologically driven depictions of black life.

To Brown, realism was not only a literary but a moral tool, enabling black and white writers alike to confront honestly the social, political, and ethical issues that inevitably dogged any effort to represent black life. But Brown also saw African-American literature, for all its distinctiveness, as continuous with American literature at large; indeed, *The Negro Caravan* is deeply ambivalent on the question of whether there is such a thing as African-American literature. Above all, what Brown aimed at was a critical and self-critical black discourse, one that assumed and would thus help to create a place for black writers in American public culture.

The strict moral consciousness adumbrated in Brown's concern with realism is precisely what is absent from Gates's more cathartic preoccupation with "signifying." By making a fetish of lower-class culture, Gates ducks the question of how black writers might free themselves to transcend their material, social, and political surroundings. No less importantly, he forfeits the role of the intellectual as critic and judge of his own social order—an order in which, today, the black lower class happens to play a deeply problematic role.

This is not to say that the Gates perspective is entirely without merit. It has illuminated the work of writers like Zora Neale Hurston, and has also helped clarify patterns of influence *among* black writers, including Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Ishmael Reed. The reputation of Reed, a deft satirist of the world of white patronage, has especially benefited from Gates's literary attention.

In the end, though, what *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* shows is the deep inadequacy of the vernacular model—and, more broadly, of the ideological reductivism that now dominates the field of black literary studies and

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much of our current discourse on race alike. In the diversity and even the self-contradiction of the writings that fill its many pages, the new *Norton* itself escapes the limits of the environment in which it was conceived, and honors an earlier and better idea of literature as a mirror of the mixed truths of lived human experience.

In the Middle

Pleasure Wars
by Peter Gay
Norton. 324 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
Diana Schaub

"Victorian" and "bourgeois" have become distinctly less acceptable as synonyms for hypocritical and philistine in the wake of the Yale historian Peter Gay's monumental reexamination of 19th-century European and American culture. His revisionist history has taken shape in five volumes bearing the collective title *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. The burden of the whole has been to show the variety and complexity of bourgeois life through a focus on certain fundamental human passions.

Gay's researches into the inner life of the bourgeoisie have yielded volumes on sex and love (*Education of the Senses* and *The Tender Passion*), the inclination to aggression (*The Cultivation of Hatred*), and strategies for ennobling the bourgeois self (*The Naked Heart*). In this fifth and final volume, *Pleasure Wars*, he takes up the formation of taste and the emergence of modernism in the arts. The memorable verdict of the first volume—"Bourgeois eros ranged from extreme repression to unabashed libertinism, but for the average couple, there seems to have been far greater sexual pleasure, for both partners, than we have been led to believe"—finds its counterpart in this new realm. Just as lots of Victorians liked sex, so too, lots of them had taste.

This was not, needless to say, the verdict reached by contemporary vilifiers of the middle class. Gay begins with these self-avowed "bourgeoisophobes," novelists like Gustave Flaubert whose loathing of "stupid grocers" (his all-purpose epithet for the bourgeoisie) was so intense that it left him nauseated. Philosophers as diverse as Marx and Nietzsche added to the abusive caricature, and their slanders came to be accepted as reportage.

The middle class did have its defenders, however, even among the ranks of fringe-dwelling artists. The poet Charles Baudelaire, for instance, referred to the bourgeoisie as "the natural friends of the arts." Taking his cue from such surprising allies, Gay argues that the bourgeoisie, far from being "the sworn adversary" of unconventional art, as the standard view would have it, was in fact its principal backer, not least of all financially.

This intersection of commerce and culture is a leading theme of *Pleasure Wars*. Gay goes to great lengths to describe what the various strata of the bourgeoisie could purchase in the way of artistic expression and cultural goods. Thus, by setting out the pricing of opera tickets in Munich right down to the last pfennig, he shows how an impecunious student attending a special matinee might enjoy the same performance as a local notable at a world premiere. Such accessibility meant that culture was less and less the preserve of aristocrats and magnates.

The upper echelons did exercise a guiding influence, however. In one especially interesting chapter, Gay compares the elites of Manchester

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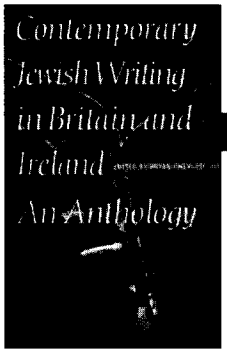

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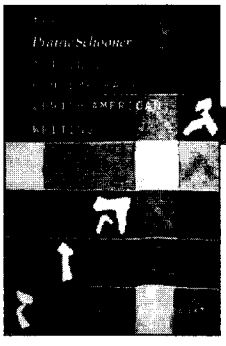

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and Munich. In Manchester, arts patronage was entirely in the hands of enterprising and highly educated merchants and manufacturers, many of them assimilated German-Jewish immigrants like the calico printer Hermann Leo and the Jewish-born Unitarian Salis Schwabe. By contrast, the tone in Munich was set by the royal house of Ludwig I and Ludwig II, the latter of whom was Richard Wagner's besotted patron. In this contest between "self-help and state sponsorship," Gay gives the laurels to Manchester, attesting to the reality of the city's motto: "By the gains of Industry we promote Art."

WITH THE democratization of the cultural scene, a need arose for new authorities. Enter the critics and reviewers who became the guides to pleasure and the guardians of opinion. According to Gay, the foremost of these "acknowledged legislators"—writers like William Hazlitt and Matthew Arnold in England, or C.A. Sainte-Beuve in France—were themselves "bourgeois refining the palate of other bourgeois." Their intent was frankly pedagogical, and their audience included not only the public but artists themselves. "It is striking testimony to the anxiety of creative spirits in the presence of critics," writes Gay, "that beginning in the 1880's, [the painter Claude] Monet subscribed to two clipping services."

Not everyone checked in with the critics first. Gay devotes two chapters to independent-minded collectors, particularly highlighting the role they played in the eventual success of the Impressionists. Interestingly, wealth was not a prerequisite for significant acquisition. Among the earliest discoverers of Cézanne was Victor Chocquet, a chief clerk in the customs house in Paris. Despite his quite limited means, Chocquet was able to assemble a truly impressive collection of modern French art, including works by Delacroix, Monet, Pissarro, and Renoir and more than 30 paintings by his beloved Cézanne.

Gay is aware, of course, that such affection for the avant-garde was hardly universal among the bourgeoisie. Throughout *Pleasure Wars*, one encounters members of the middle class on every side of the 19th century's disputes over art, from staunch traditionalists to votaries of the new. For Gay, however, these very controversies and divisions promoted the eventual victory of modernism.

The bourgeois, Gay observes,

> performed their historic service to modernism almost as much by reviling as by endorsing it; they gave it the kind of publicity the modernists would never have enjoyed without the shocked exclamations of insulted lovers of art, music, or dance.

The irony, then, is that the virulent "bourgeoisophobes" among modernist artists, like Flaubert, turned out to be dependent on the "stupid grocers" for their success, while the bourgeois themselves, whether knowingly or not, served the cultural and political aims of those intent on their destruction.

GAY'S REVISIONIST history is a helpful counter to the tendentious caricature of the crass and priggish bourgeois. Yet when all is said and done, it is unclear what exactly he intends to put in place of the caricature. He describes his project as "a crowded, colorful, and recognizable portrait" in the pointillist style—which means that once we get sufficient distance from the bourgeois experience, it "should cohere into a whole." Yet his method achieves just the opposite effect. Though details are traced with realistic exactitude, the overall impression is a mishmash.

For Gay, to be bourgeois is to be everything, and anything: "the spectrum of bourgeois taste covered the whole range of possible expressions from the outer edges of conservatism to those of radicalism, from the support of the conventional to the equally determined support of the unconventional." Even those whose motto was "*épater le bourgeois*" (shock the middle class) are themselves to be called bourgeois.

Gay may be right that the pleasure wars, rather than being a struggle between bourgeois and bohemian, were really a series of internal contests within the bourgeoisie itself. If that is the case, however, it becomes imperative to explore the self-division and self-contradiction that lie at the heart of what it means to be bourgeois—something that Gay, despite his professed indebtedness to psychoanalysis, does not undertake to do. Perhaps if he had traced bourgeoisophobia back to its (non-phobic) beginnings in the thought of Rousseau, he could have helped the reader better understand the quality of "in-betweenness" that leaves the bourgeois so undefined. According to Rousseau, still the most profound student of the subject, the bourgeois "will never be either man or citizen," for he is "always in contradiction with himself, always floating between his inclinations and his duties."

An appreciation of the bourgeoisie's dissatisfaction with itself would also help to explain the eventual triumph of the avant-garde in this century—and might have led Gay to entertain more reservations about the desirability of that triumph. In our own time, after all, the obsession of artists with administering polemical shocks to bourgeois society has gone so far that art often seems to have lost all connection to pleasure, not to mention beauty and truth.

Henry James was already aware, at the close of the last century, of the dangers of an art animated by hatred of its audience. In a review of Flaubert, James wrote of "the strange weakness of [Flaubert's] mind, his puerile dread of the grocer," and asserted that this sentiment had "sterilized a whole province of French literature." What James reminds us is that artistic authenticity does not require

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bourgeois-bashing, and that the truest art entirely transcends the pleasure wars.

The Posthumous Penitent

Shadows on the Hudson
by Isaac Bashevis Singer
translated by Joseph Sherman
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 548 pp. $28.00

Reviewed by
Hillel Halkin

Two men have won the Nobel Prize in this century for writing in Jewish languages, S.Y. Agnon (1888-1970) and Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-91), and both have gone on publishing prolifically after their deaths.

Agnon's posthumous career has involved many hundreds of pages of manuscript material, left behind in an all but indecipherable Hebrew handwriting, that have been laboriously decoded, edited, and brought to print. With Singer, things have been simpler. A regular contributor to the daily *Forward*, in which many of his Yiddish novels were serialized, he did not live to see all of them translated or even published in book form in Yiddish. Several that had not appeared in English before his death in 1991 have done so afterward.

Shadows on the Hudson was serialized in the *Forward* from January 1957 to January 1958, running twice weekly in some 100 installments. It is thus one of the earliest and longest of Singer's novels, as well as one of the few set in America. Read by us today, in the light of his subsequent work, it cannot but seem a somewhat different book from what it did to its Yiddish readers 40 years ago.

Not a less noteworthy one, however. On the contrary: an absorbing novel in its own right, *Shadows on the Hudson* has the added value of showing us a Singer who, precisely because he seems more morally earnest and religiously anguished than the artful juggler of demons, dybbuks, and eccentric Jews that his American readers came to know him as, makes us realize how elaborately crafted was this impish mask of his later years.

As is generally true of serialized novels, a European genre that lingered on in the Yiddish press long after its disappearance elsewhere, *Shadows on the Hudson* has a large cast. Most of its main characters are formally introduced to us in an opening set piece, a long chapter in which we meet them as guests at a Manhattan dinner party given sever-

Hillel Halkin *is an Israeli essayist and critic whose work appears regularly in these pages.*

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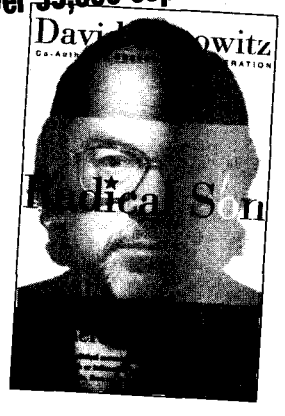

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al years after the end of World War II by the Polish Jew Boris Makaver, a religiously observant and financially well-off widower who has successfully rebuilt his life in America.

Those seated at Makaver's table, all mutually acquainted Polish-born Jews like himself, include: his daughter Anna, an attractive and unhappily married woman in her early thirties, who has come with her morose husband Stanislaw Luria; Hertz Grein, an ex-schoolteacher and investment consultant in his middle forties who was Anna's Hebrew tutor in Warsaw when she was a girl; Professor David Shrage, a mathematician with an interest in occultism who shares an apartment with a Gentile medium named Mrs. Clark; Dr. Solomon Margolin, an ex-fellow yeshiva student with Makaver, now an atheistic physician; Zadok Halperin, a retired lecturer and author of several well-known works in contemporary philosophy; and Halperin's sister Frieda Tamar, an observant Jew like Makaver, whose husband, like much of the family of the other guests, has perished in the Holocaust.

Present too at Boris Makaver's dinner is his nephew Herman, a card-carrying Communist-party member who goes off to Russia early in the novel and disappears in a Stalinist purge there. Not surprisingly, then, Hitler, Stalin, and the Jewish people are the subject of much of the conversation around the table, which soon has the guests, old friends though they are, heatedly accusing one another of being Communists, fascists, religious fanatics, and godless blasphemers.

Something else happens at Boris Makaver's apartment on this night: Anna and Hertz Grein, on whom Anna's childhood crush has stayed alive over the years, commence a romance. Before many more chapters have passed, Anna leaves Luria and runs off to Miami with Hertz, who in turn deserts two women for her—his wife Leah and his mistress Esther.

By the end of *Shadows on the Hudson*, Hertz Grein has left Anna, returned to Leah, left Leah again to run off with Esther, and left Esther for Jerusalem, where—stricken with remorse over the deaths of Leah and Stanislaw Luria, for which he holds himself responsible—he has become a religious penitent and returned to the Orthodoxy of his youth; Anna has remarried her first husband, the dissolute but charming actor Yasha Kotik; and Boris Makaver has wed Frieda Tamar, lost most of his wealth in a bad investment, and been estranged from and reconciled with his daughter. Esther, for her part, has married the religious psychoanalyst Dr. Alswanger, who believes that only Judaism is capable of conducting "an open and unyielding war against Satan"; Margolin is back together with his German wife Lise, who deserted him in Berlin for a Nazi and is now herself a pious convert to Judaism; and a dying Dr. Shrage, having discovered that Mrs. Clark is a fake, is still "begging for a revelation, for a gleam from the other side of the curtain, a sign that there was something beyond physicality, [although] he was granted nothing but bodily aches and empty imaginings."

READERS CONVERSANT with Singer's work will find plenty of recognizable themes here. There are the familiar men and women, alternately driven by sexual desire, romantic fantasy, defiant will, and repentant conscience, who oscillate among different lovers and fates. There is the conflict between the human longing for freedom, which can just as well lead to moral anarchy as to creative autonomy, and the human craving for authority, which can educate one in self-discipline no less than in blind conformity. There is the thirst for transcendence, which draws Jews abandoning their ancestral traditions to messianic politics and false gods. And there is more that one sees elsewhere in Singer, too.

What much of Singer's work has, however, and *Shadows on the Hudson* lacks, is his ironic playing-off of these themes against one another, leaving him as the enigmatically winking master of ceremonies presiding over a wild discord of contradictions. More specifically, of all Singer's fiction, *Shadows on the Hudson* comes down most clearly on the side of Jewish tradition—an advocacy emphasized by its epilogue, a long letter written from his Jerusalem retreat to an American friend by Hertz Grein, who literally has the book's last word.

"One day," Grein writes, explaining his return to the religion of his fathers, "I went to [the ultra-Orthodox quarter of] Me'ah Shearim and there I saw that there are still Jews [who] wear garments that bear witness from afar that they are God's servants." And he continues:

> [One cannot be] a Jew if one does not belong to God's army and does not wear God's stamp upon oneself. . . . If one turns one step away from the old Jewishness, one finds oneself in the midst of idolaters and murderers, and one rears children who marry Nazis. . . . There is not, and there cannot be, any compromise or middle way or reform. All the restrictions and prohibitions of Jewish law are essential, as necessary as isolating and protecting people from deadly rays or from the plague. One cannot wear Gentile clothing, take pleasure in their literature, be entertained in their theaters, eat in their restaurants, and then observe the Ten Commandments.

Yet what Grein has returned to is religious practice, not faith. In fact, he writes,

> Whoever has read the modern Bible critics, archeologists, historians, and all the rest of them can never again be whole in his faith. . . . At the very moment that I wind the leather strap of my phylacteries around my arm and I kiss the boxes which enclose the sacred words, it occurs to me that the Torah is a work of

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> the imagination. . . . But then I tell myself that since my phylacteries bind the tiger within me, I have no choice but to put them on. . . . No one has better tamed that beast than the Jew. . . . As long as the other nations continue going to church in the morning and hunting in the afternoon, they will remain unbridled beasts and will go on producing Hitlers and their monstrosities.

Hitler, already an uninvited presence at Boris Makaver's dinner party, looms large over this book—as does his fellow mass murderer Stalin, with whom he is coupled repeatedly in the declarations and thoughts of Singer's characters. The two of them, indeed, *are* the shadows on the Hudson, twin proofs of the bestiality of man and the nonexistence of God that haunt even the safe streets of New York in the late 1940's. Reduced to its thematic bones, one might say, Singer's novel is an exploration of the paradox that the same 20th-century horrors that have made it impossible to believe in God have demonstrated the necessity for believing in Him more than ever.

Hertz Grein, of course, is far from a simple autobiographical projection, but one cannot read *Shadows on the Hudson* without sensing that it was written as an act of penitence on Singer's part, too. As the son of an ultra-Orthodox Warsaw rabbi whom he loved yet whose way of life he had cast aside long before leaving Poland; as a man who abandoned a wife and small child in Warsaw when he came to New York in 1935; and as a lonely and still largely unrecognized Yiddish writer in America, most of whose friends, colleagues, and family had been wiped out by the Nazis, Singer, one feels, set out in this novel to conduct a reckoning that had in it much guilt and remorse. As such, it may be, *Shadows on the Hudson* represents a temporary loss of the masterful equilibrium that characterizes most of his work—and it is this that makes it so interesting.

I began by mentioning Agnon. It is curious, for all their very different styles and temperaments, how much alike in their views the Hebrew Nobel Prize winner and the creator of Hertz Grein appear to be. Both Agnon and the author of *Shadows on the Hudson* would seem to agree that, although the God of Sinai is no longer contactable, the Law He gave there remains the only bulwark against inner and outer chaos; both arrive at this conclusion not from an underestimation of the human passions, but from a recognition of their strength; both are therefore located—not only folkloristically but morally and philosophically—in the mainstream of Jewish tradition.

Rereading even the later Singer in this light might lead one to discover, I suspect, that, despite the reputation he cultivated in America for being the puckish free spirit of the Jewish religious genius, a man on equally good terms with angels and devils and not inclined to side with one or the other, he never, beneath the winking mask, moved far from this position.

Can Liberalism Be Saved?

Achieving Our Country:
Leftist Thought In
Twentieth-Century America
by Richard Rorty
Harvard. 144 pp. $18.95

Reviewed by
Peter Berkowitz

Richard Rorty, a professor of humanities at the University of Virginia, is among the best-known academic proponents of postmodernism, a movement whose credo declares all knowledge to be man-made, corresponding to no ultimate reality. Like his fellow theorists, Rorty believes that notions like truth and justice are "social constructs." Like them, too, he believes, as he wrote in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989), that "nothing has an intrinsic nature" and that "anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed."

What sets Rorty apart is that he promotes these views so engagingly, in writings notable for their rhetorical virtuosity and their (relative) lack of jargon. A favorite among professors, undergraduates, and readers of op-ed pages alike, he is one of postmodernism's great popularizers.

Of no less importance, Rorty has given those who share his philosophical views a way to remain liberals in good standing, despite the seeming dependence of liberalism

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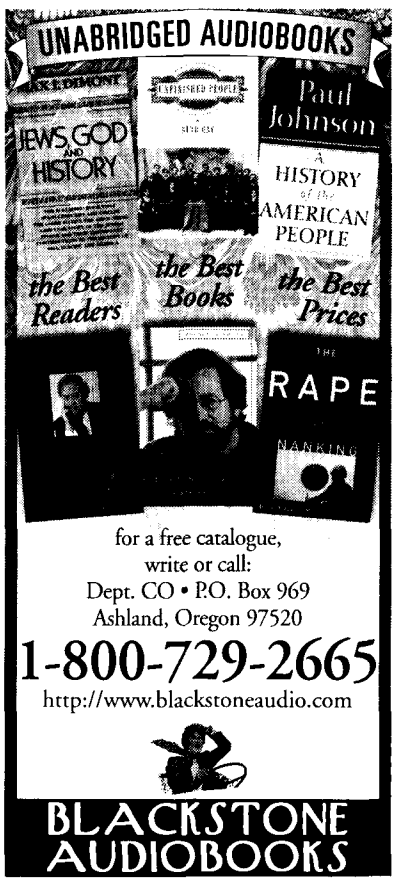
Peter Berkowitz, *a new contributor, is associate professor of government at Harvard and the author of* Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist.



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on certain immutable first principles like "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." His solution has been to wed postmodernism to the pragmatism of John Dewey (1859-1952). With its distrust of abstraction and its redefinition of philosophy as the effort to solve practical problems, as well as in its emphasis on pluralism, progress, and democracy, pragmatism, on Rorty's account, furnishes the committed postmodernist with an attractive political project.

In this slender, readable new book, based on his 1997 Massey lectures at Harvard, Rorty turns his attention as never before to practical politics. His aim is to encourage leftist intellectuals, once prominent in American public life, to return to the fray, "to think of American citizenship as an opportunity for action." What he actually accomplishes is a far different thing, however, for *Achieving Our Country* points to nothing so much as the continuing confusion in America's academic Left.

FOR RORTY, the Left in the U.S. was defined for most of its history by a profound commitment to democracy. Much more than a simple devotion to popular government, this was a proselytizing creed, aimed at democratizing every sphere of life and exhorting the American people to improve their lot by challenging authority in all its guises. For inspiration, this leftist tradition drew from the writings of two great "prophets." One of them, of course, was Dewey, whose philosophy of experimentation was, in Rorty's words, "a systematic attempt to temporalize everything, to leave nothing fixed." But the other, earlier one was Walt Whitman, whose poetry, says Rorty, taught that there is "no standard, not even a divine one, against which the decisions of a free people can be measured."

According to Rorty, the civic program espoused by Whitman and Dewey was also aggressively secular. For American democracy, as Rorty presents it, has little to do with such old-fashioned notions as religious pluralism. Rather, finding "no room for obedience to a nonhuman authority," the true democratic faith necessarily seeks to uproot and replace all rival faiths, not least Christianity and Judaism. "Other nations thought of themselves as hymns to the glory of God," Rorty writes. "We redefine God as our future selves."

It is this peculiar brand of self-deifying optimism that, for Rorty, served as the guiding principle of "all those Americans who, between 1900 and 1964, struggled within the framework of constitutional democracy to protect the weak from the strong." The "reformist" American Left, he argues, was—like Whitman, like Dewey—proud of its country; it criticized America in order to improve America. And improve America it did. Determined to redistribute wealth and privilege, it supported labor unions, constructed the welfare state, led the civil-rights movement, and advanced the interests of women and minorities. Properly utopian in its aims, on Rorty's view, it dreamed of ending suffering and of establishing a classless and casteless society.

And then what happened? Rorty's lament is that, over the last 30 years, this politically-engaged movement—in its ranks he includes an assortment of progressives, liberals, and radicals from Herbert Croly, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr. to Michael Harrington, Irving Howe, and Jesse Jackson—has been supplanted, especially in the academy, by what he calls the cultural or "spectatorial" Left. Today's leftist intellectuals, he writes, are all theory, no practice. Under the influence of French theorists like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, they have become mocking, hyper-sophisticated observers of American life, a life in which they decline to participate. Charging their country with unforgivable sins, disdaining its constitutional order, they do nothing about it. Whereas the old Left offered reforms to improve the lives of real people, the new Left simply sits in judgment, a complacent elite.

IT IS refreshing to find so hard-hitting a portrait of the contemporary academic Left in the work of one of its own. Welcome, too, is Rorty's condemnation of the Left's abiding weakness for Marx, and his uncompromising stand against Communism—he does not hesitate to describe the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." But these gestures aside, *Achieving Our Country* makes it abundantly clear that in the end, little actually separates Rorty from those he accuses of betraying the true faith.

For one thing, despite his hectoring about the primacy of the practical, nowhere in this book does Rorty put forward a single concrete suggestion for a new political initiative or public policy. More serious, and striking at the very heart of his claim to be a pragmatist, is his refusal to acknowledge that the agenda pursued over the course of six decades by the "reformist" Left—from expanding welfare and affirmative action to promoting unionism and higher taxes—has been, in important respects, a *practical* failure. In the last few years, indeed, this very failure has prompted a "reformist" effort of a very different complexion.

To admit this, however, would require that Rorty recognize the immense popular success of the American conservative movement—something he will not do. In fact, he can hardly bring himself to refer to the right side of the political spectrum—that is, approximately half of his fellow citizens—without falling into indignation and rancor. In America, only the Left is "the party of hope," the sole carrier of decency, justice, and goodness, while the Right is the party of greed, bigotry, military chauvinism, and benighted religiosity, "the pawn of the rich and

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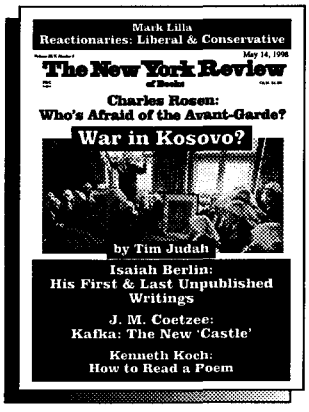

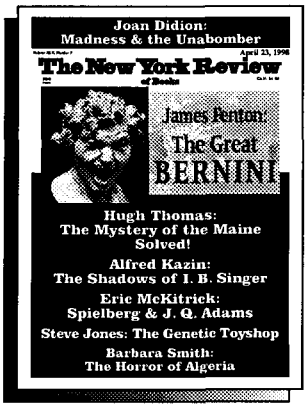

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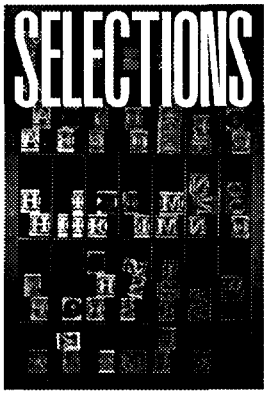

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powerful." Such absolutism and scorn for those who do not share his political views sound odd, to say the least, in the mouth of one who has indicted the present-day Left for its theoretical excess, and who professes to place his own faith in the people.

It is revealing, of course, that our premier postmodernist defender of liberalism should turn out to be lacking in the true liberal spirit, with its respect for contending perspectives and its appreciation of limits. Like so many of his friends on the academic Left, Richard Rorty shows that those who seek to emancipate us from all external authority, far from inaugurating a salutary human liberation, open the door instead to dogmatism and intolerance.

Torn Robes

Out of Order:
Arrogance, Corruption, and Incompetence on the Bench
by Max Boot
Basic Books. 288 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Andrew C. McCarthy

BY ITS author's own admission, *Out of Order* is a polemic—to be precise, an impassioned attack on the wayward members of the American judiciary. In one hair-raising anecdote after another, Max Boot, an editor of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, takes aim at all the "backslappers and palm greasers, toadies and lickspittles" who, thanks to our politicized processes of appointment, have been transfigured into black-robed custodians of the law. For Boot, those robes are threadbare and torn, revealing judicial sins of a high order.

First on his list of offenses is personal corruption. In this category we meet, among others, Judge A. Ted Bozeman, Alabama's "backwoods Blackstone," who saddled General Motors of "Dee-troit" with a $150-million jury verdict in an empty civil suit. In doing so, Bozeman endorsed the race-baiting antics of a plaintiff's attorney who just happened to employ much of the Bozeman family and to be representing Mrs. Bozeman in a similar suit. Then there is Judge Paula Lopossa of Indianapolis. A jurist with a weakness for elderly miscreants, she declined to jail an old roué who maimed a woman after beating her, as well as the geriatric rapist of a nineteen-year-old girl—the latter assault being mitigated, in the judge's mind, by the victim's provocative apparel.

The next circle in Boot's inferno is inhabited by the incompetent, among them the ineffable Lance Ito. In a sharply drawn sketch of the O. J. Simpson trial, Boot shows how Judge Ito turned his courtroom into a Ringling Brothers circus, allowing such outrages as the playing of the race card by the demagogic Johnnie Cochran. As Boot succinctly concludes, "'Judge Ego' was fatally lacking in the *gravitas* needed to preside over a major trial."

Finally, we arrive at arrogance, a generic transgression for which Boot reserves his greatest scorn. He sees such arrogance expressed chiefly in the naked political activism of judges who have seized for themselves the prerogatives properly belonging to other branches or levels of government. Of special concern to Boot is the federal bench's hostility to federalism itself. Time and again, he charges, liberal judges have manipulated the Constitution to buck the democratic decisions of states whose citizens do not happen to share those judges' sensibilities.

Under this heading, Boot thrashes Judge Thelton Henderson, of the U.S. district court in San Francisco, for his imperious (if ultimately unsuccessful) attempt last year to derail California's Proposition 209, a ballot initiative banning the state from using racial quotas and set-asides. Likewise, Boot upbraids the Supreme Court for deciding, in *Romer* v. *Evans* (1996), that Coloradans had denied equal protection to homosexuals by voting in a statewide referendum against giving them special preferences. As Boot observes, not only are these rulings bad law, but they haughtily ignore the role that state autonomy can play in providing different parts of the population with "a high level of self-determination," thus "dissipat[ing] separatist pressures" in our diverse society.

In connection with judicial activism Boot also focuses on the legal device known as a consent decree, whereby a municipality can put an end to troublesome litigation by allowing the courts to monitor one or another part of its domain. Under such arrangements, power-hungry judges now perform a range of duties entirely outside their competence. They double as wardens, releasing hard-core criminals in the name of more commodious jails; as urban planners, ensuring that residential developments include a fixed percentage of minority residents; and as one-man finance committees, imposing taxes to fund their various redistributionist schemes.

APART FROM having no authority to legislate or execute, judges, Boot points out, are also singularly ill-equipped for those roles. Since they address policy questions only when and as such questions happen to arise in litigation, judges often have no feeling for the wider issues at stake. Nor do they possess anything like the capacity of executives and legislators for gathering facts and bringing to bear the advice of outside experts. Worst of all, judges are rarely required to face voters, and in this sense cannot be held accountable for the consequences of their decisions. Is it thus any wonder that, indulging

ANDREW C. MCCARTHY, *a new contributor, was the lead U.S. prosecutor in one of the World Trade Center bombing trials.*

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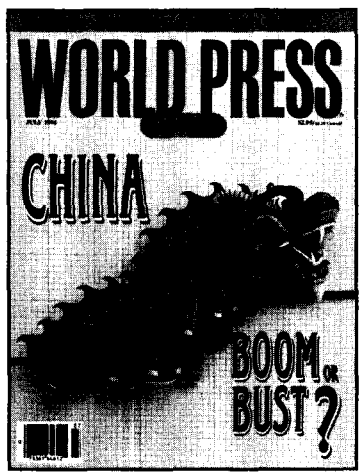

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their subjective sense of justice without benefit of moderating influences, judicial activists have presided over some of our most disastrous experiments in social engineering?

As for why such impositions continue to be tolerated, and even venerated, Boot points to the enduring prestige of *Brown* v. *Board of Education* (1954), "the Magna Carta," in his words, "of judicial activism." In abolishing school segregation without offering any real constitutional justification, the Supreme Court, he argues, set a destructive precedent. Whereas it was once thought that a federal court had no business telling a state and its citizens how to conduct their affairs unless they were clearly violating some provision of the Constitution, judges began to take it as their duty to drag the benighted masses kicking and screaming into a more enlightened age.

To Boot, the essence of democracy is that even the most execrable and anachronistic practices should be undone democratically, through legislative action or constitutional amendment. The alternative is a tyrannical "juristocracy"—which is what he concludes we are in danger of veering toward.

MAX BOOT's news from the front lines is a welcome complement to recent works on judicial power by Robert H. Bork (who contributes a foreword to this book), Richard A. Posner, and others. *Out of Order* is a much less analytical work than these, but Boot is a superb reporter, and his piquantly related stories stoke the reader's indignation just as they are intended to do.

Still, a polemic based on anecdotes always carries the danger that its subjects, though portrayed as paradigms, may instead be aberrations. This danger is not lost on Boot, who occasionally interrupts his stream of vitriol to assure us that he is not out to blight all jurists with the transgressions of a few. Consciously or not, however, that is sometimes the effect *Out of Order* conveys, especially in the chapters on corruption and incompetence.

Boot is more successful in his attack on judicial activism, where his conclusions do not rest so heavily on the deeds of assorted scoundrels and bumblers. If he falters here, it is paradoxically from a certain timidity in following through on the logic of his own argument. Writing about the creeping subordination of liberty and democracy to judicial fiat, he concedes that "[a]t least with *Brown*, no matter how tangled its reasoning, the result is one we can all applaud." Perhaps so; but when he then goes on to protest against the subsequent steering of *Brown* into new terrain like racial and sexual preferences, Boot inadvertently suggests that his objections have more to do with particular outcomes he finds unpalatable than with the skewed process itself.

Finally, one wishes Boot had said more about how the malfunctions he catalogs might be mended. The shoddy selection procedures that guarantee a certain percentage of bad judges are, in the end, the handiwork of our lawmakers, who should be brought to account. Both the legislative and the executive branches are also guilty of helping to promote judicial activism by fudging on politically controversial issues and leaving the courts to sort out the details.

And then there is the press. The biases of the print media are, of course, a matter of record. But television's role may be somewhat more ambiguous than Boot allows. Though he is convinced that the presence of television cameras was the reason the circus was in town during the Simpson trial, it may actually be the reason we *knew* the circus was in town. Banning television from trial courts, as Boot proposes, could deprive us of one of the few relatively unfiltered sources we have for keeping tabs on the judiciary.

In sum, Max Boot has written a book that ably and entertainingly describes the misdeeds many judges commit. But when it comes to our out-of-order judiciary, what happens in the courtroom may be only the place to start.

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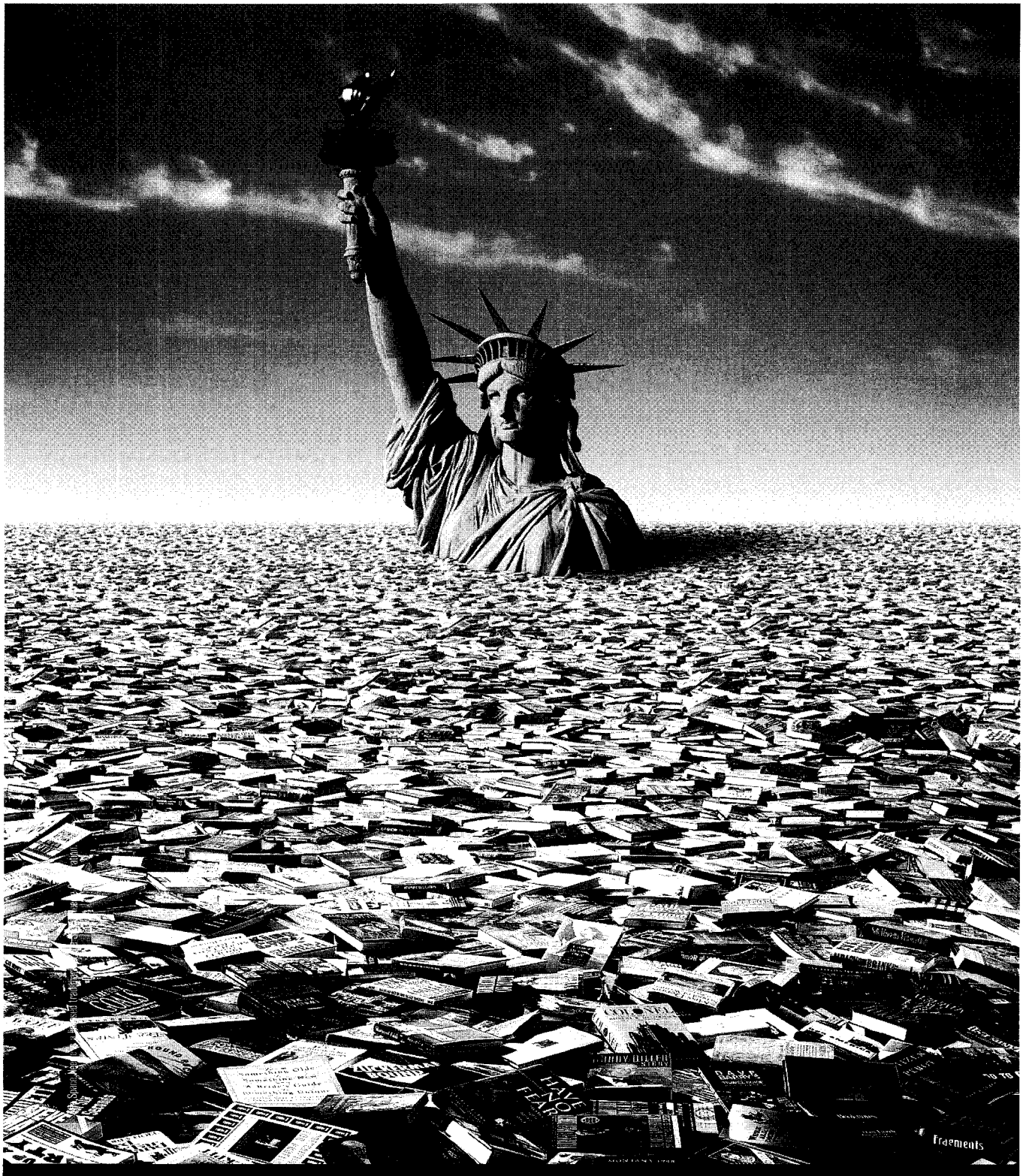

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And we've never looked back.
We've been too busy
hounding our competition.

Today, we're an $11 billion
group of companies in
worldwide property and
casualty insurance.

We're old, established, big.
And anything but staid.

In fact, it's our unusually
innovative approach to
insurance that's helping us
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It might sound self-serving
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Fortune 500 companies—and
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In any event, should you come
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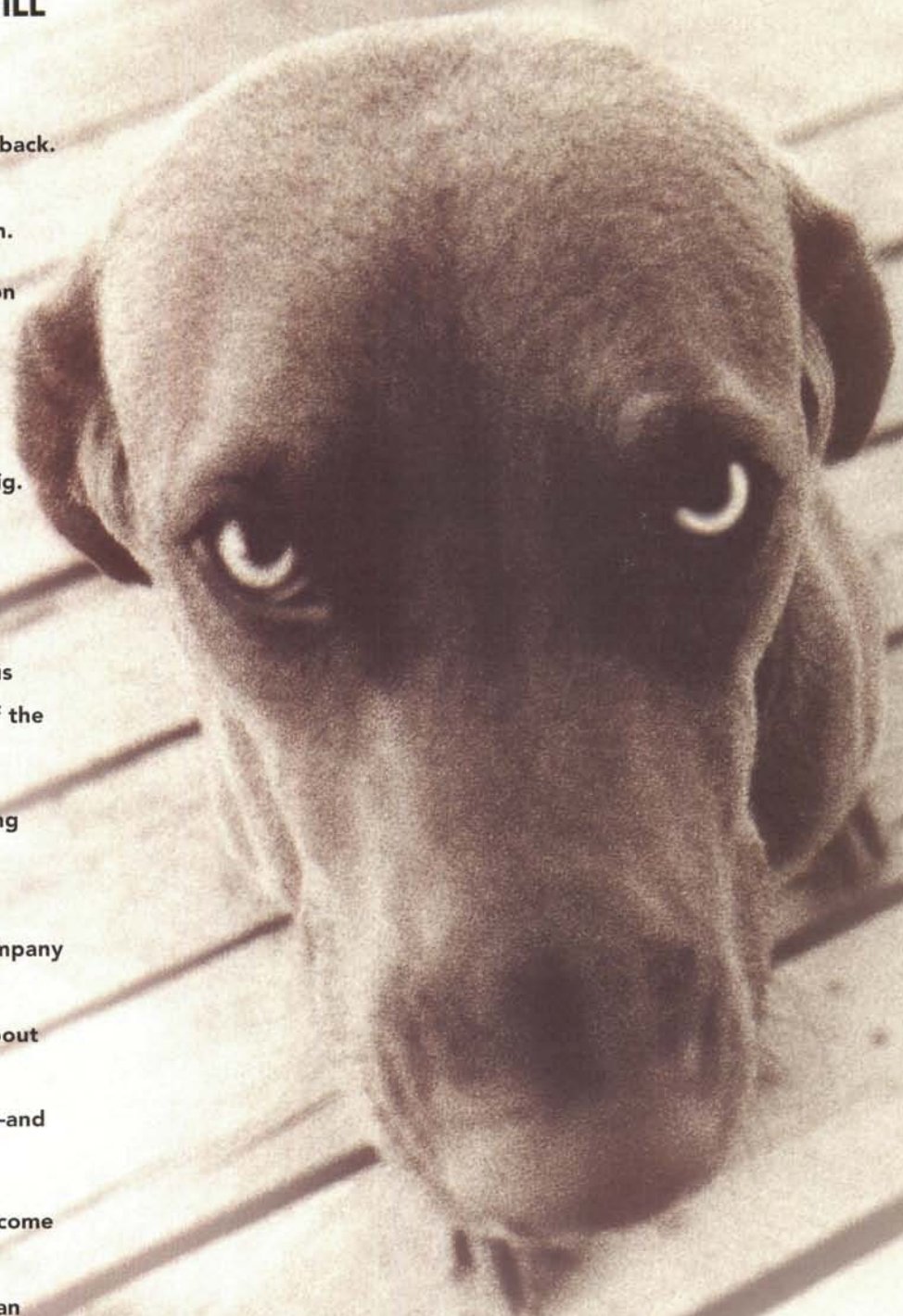
or a building, you can at least
be certain of one thing.

Nobody's parked there.



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